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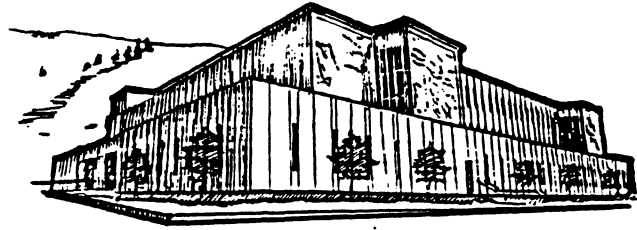
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University of  
**Montana**



NELLIE BROWNE  
THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ROLES OF AN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
WESTERN MONTANAN

by

Kathy Jeanne Doolittle

B. A., University of Montana--Missoula, 1974

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of History

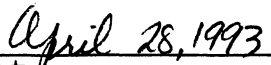
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History

Nellie Browne

The Multi-Dimensional Roles of an Early Twentieth-Century  
Western Montanan (180 pp.)

Director: Kenneth A. Lockridge *KAL*

The life of Helen Jane (Nellie) Browne is the focus of this study. Her ability to adapt to the changing roles required of rural western women during the transitional period between the Victorian Age and the Progressive Era is examined in light of the effects and influences of marriage, family, and society. Three separate aspects of Nellie's life are studied: her values, her gender roles within society, and her ability to cope with change. Because both her husband and brother were committed to the Montana State Hospital, societal values of the early 1900s concerning mental illness are also examined in relation to their impact on Nellie's life.

The Bradley Collection, a private collection owned and loaned to the author by Kathy and David Bradley of Glen, Montana, is comprised of letters, records, notes, photographs, and artifacts of Nellie Browne. This, along with personal interviews of several individuals who knew Nellie, provided much of the material for this study. In addition, public documents, newspapers, and the files from Warm Springs Hospital, located in the University of Montana Archives, were used. A variety of secondary sources were used for background information and context.

The transitional nature of the era in which Nellie lived influenced her life both positively and negatively. Spaces created by the adjustments taking place within society enabled her to claim a greater autonomy, but also left her bereft of a support system when she most needed it. Without that support, Nellie was unable to cope successfully with both the stigma of having mentally ill family members and the challenge of managing a household on her own. At the end of her life, she found herself unprepared to assume the financial and managerial responsibilities left to her by an absent husband. Because Nellie's situation and experiences were not unique, historians can make comparisons and draw correlations between her responses and those of other western women of similar time, place, and circumstance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT . . . . .	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .	iii
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS . . . . .	iv
INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
CHAPTER I, BIOGRAPHY. . . . .	17
CHAPTER II, VALUES. . . . .	63
CHAPTER III, ROLES AND MATURATION . . . . .	101
CHAPTER IV, COPING WITH FAMILY CRISES . . . . .	129
CONCLUSION. . . . .	163
SOURCES CONSULTED . . . . .	174

## LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph	Page
1. Browne Ranch, view facing south . . . . .	23
2. Browne Ranch, view from yard, facing west . . . . .	24
3. Helen Jane Browne on her wedding day. . . . .	29
4. Joseph Aloysius Browne. . . . .	50
5. Social group from Twin Bridges . . . . .	83
6. Katherine Dullea. . . . .	92
7. Dullea sisters and two friends. . . . .	92
8. Nellie and Joseph with friends in Portland. . . . .	93
9. Nellie with friend at Browne's Ranch. . . . .	94

## INTRODUCTION

In a passionate call for stories told by women's voices, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot explains that "for too long public discourse and public policy have been largely dominated and shaped by men. These male perspectives often express a preoccupation with rationality, materialism, hierarchy, and militarism, and too often seem distant from the themes of communication, relationship, intimacy, and community building".<sup>1</sup> Our reliance on these perspectives has led to an artificially shaped definition of what constitutes historical significance, and traditional histories are replete with stories that fit within the common themes of conquest, power, and exploitation. For example, the American West has been historically portrayed as a landscape dominated by males; male heroes, as a matter of fact. As historian Susan Armitage expressed it, "Occupationally, these heroes are diverse: they are mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners, and desperadoes, but they share one distinguishing characteristic---they are all men."<sup>2</sup>

In an imaginative and pointed challenge to this stereotyped view, Armitage labels such a west "Hisland", and

links the lure of its mythical depiction to our love for heroic tales: "stories of adventure, exploration, and conflict."<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are other reasons for this type of approach. Armitage suggests that the singular focus of Hisland makes it an easier story to organize for retelling and that its "tried and true" quality insures its acceptance.<sup>4</sup> Another possibility for the pervasiveness of Hisland is that it is the natural product of a field of study traditionally dominated by men. Quite simply, the male historian may have a tendency to focus on male activities because his perspective on what is historical is male-oriented.

The problem with this version of the American West is that it omits much; its focus is too narrow. Nowhere can we find ordinary people interacting together to endure the trials of everyday life. Where are the families, the women and children, the people who established farms and towns on the western frontier? Until we leave Hisland, we will be deprived of both recognizing and understanding a crucial dimension of our American past. Without this dimension our sense of national history will remain bound to the histories of heroic men, to the exclusion of all the millions of ordinary men and women whose experiences actually form our national past. Armitage argues that "ordinary lives are the true story of the West", for both women and men.<sup>5</sup> Women, long neglected in the stories of western settlement, need to

be seen in their true light, not as foils for fearless, rugged men, but as individuals who struggled, labored, suffered, and achieved in their own right.

The study of women of the American West challenges and invigorates modern historical scholars. It provides fertile ground for historians anxious to re-examine the "one dimensional and historically inaccurate" heroic male version of western history that established our exclusionary sense of national identity, an image bolstered by John Wayne films and Zane Grey novels. Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, in their introduction to *The Women's West*, call for a new type of history in our efforts to discover the historical place of western women. They demand "more detailed histories of actual lives" that will enable us not only to enrich our knowledge base, but also to clarify our perceptions.<sup>6</sup> Sara Lawrence Lightfoot echoes their sentiments when she claims, "We will only begin to recognize the limitations and distortions of narrowly constructed analyses when we begin to accumulate rich and varied stories."<sup>7</sup> We will see that the forest consists of a variety of trees, each with its own beauty, purpose, and contributions.

Another historian has used a different metaphor: In the closing plenary at the Fourth Conference of the Coalition for Western Women's History, Glenda Riley concluded that for balanced history to occur, we must look at the chronological unfolding of the human experience as a

series of intersections and viewpoints.<sup>8</sup> We need a gender-inclusive history formed by studying places of intersection between male and female worlds. Women are not worthy for inclusion only if they behave like men in the historical arena of a male-dominated society. Women must be studied for the insights they offer into our national past.<sup>9</sup> They cannot simply be painted into the pre-existing pictures, for such treatment does not alter the basically masculine story line. Women need to tell their own stories so we can use these narratives to correct existing misinterpretations and misconceptions. Then, finally, we will be in a position to find our national history, a history that consists of a multiplicity of viewpoints.

But new and inclusive metaphors call for a whole series of new perceptions on the part of historians. As early as 1973, Gerda Lerner recognized the need to research women differently from men. She determined that women's positions in society have always been different in essentials from those of men. As men have usually been the definers of what attributes and behaviors determine historicity, the only women who have been able to meet those male-defined criteria were the deviants, the exceptions, the oddities who departed from the values and behaviors of what we would describe as "normal women".<sup>10</sup> It is therefore necessary to develop a new set of non-traditional perspectives with which to examine our past, and to historicize the lives of ordinary women.



These perspectives Lerner defines as challenges to women's history, and she finds several of them.

She argues that first we must acknowledge that women have a history, and that that history needs to be conceptualized separately from that of men. Women often lived under a different set of conditions and values and so must be studied with a different set of criteria. Developing appropriate questions that can reveal those conditions and values will not be easy if we rely solely on traditional male-oriented sources of information, so historians will have to free themselves of biases and prejudices concerning source material. They will be forced to research with imagination and creativity. It is possible that historians will have to establish new methods of periodization, since wars, revolutions, and religious shifts, our traditional markers of time, frequently do not impact males and females in the same way. Finally, we need to redefine our methods of categorization and study. "Women's history asks for a paradigm shift," writes Lerner, a shift that will eliminate the stereotypes and admit that historicity is determined not always by significant activities, but by a broader base of criteria.<sup>11</sup> For example, it may be necessary to ask, what were women's work roles within a given region, time, and cultural group? Or, how were women's roles culturally defined, and how did women themselves reshape role ideology?

So where do we draw the line? Are the stories of *all* women of the West historical? Yes. All women's stories can add to our growing understanding of their experiences on the frontier and how those experiences affected their lives and the lives of their families. We can use each study to aid in our search for commonalities. Eudora Welty wrote in *One Writer's Beginnings* that "in the particular resides the general", so we can use studies of individuals to help us infer generalizations about other western women.<sup>12</sup>

But all stories are not equal in their historical relevance. Some more readily lend themselves to generalizations and associations. Pamela Fergus's story, told in *The Gold Rush Widows of Little Falls*, provides insights into the sex roles and family dynamics of the mid-nineteenth century and reveals much about the separate spheres philosophy of the era.<sup>13</sup> Mary Ronan's autobiography, *Frontier Woman*, gives us a glimpse of the challenges and joys afforded to the hundreds of white women who, like her, came west and bridged the cultural gap between themselves and native women.<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Nat Collins illustrates in her story, *Cattle Queen of Montana*, the part a positive attitude played in a western woman's ability to survive and succeed.<sup>15</sup> There are many wonderful stories waiting to be told, but to help the historian in the process of organization and sorting we must first establish criteria with which we can analyze and determine the impact the particular will have on

the general. What issues, in ordinary lives, are of widest relevance to the larger history we seek to write?

To place a woman historically, we must include an examination of her values, the values associated with her social, economic, or regional group, and of how those values were defined and expressed. A woman's values determine who she is. It is likely that many women of the West arrived with one set of values, yet found the environment required another. Hence, change and adjustment should also be a major theme. The resolution of the internal conflicts such an occurrence would create had to be crucial to a woman's mental stability, and thus, its study is of importance to the historian as well.

Another focus for study is that of gender roles within the society. Because one's perceived role has such an effect on lifestyle, outlook, access to opportunities, and social contacts, an examination of a person's gender-defined role within society will divulge much about that person. Paralleling any required adjustment in one's value system, a forced change of one's gender position and/or function within the society can also impact one's philosophy and attitude.

The West was unpredictable; the vicissitudes of existence in the West caused mercurial changes in fortune and lifestyle. The investigation of changes in the economic and social climate affecting western women's lives and their

responses to these changes is vital to our understanding of these women. It was through adaptation and flexibility that western women found the ability to survive. Rigidity, especially in the West, could lead to death or madness. The degree to which adjustments were made provides us with a tool with which to assess the society.

Looming beyond such issues is the matter of autonomy. Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" has caused much debate over the degree of autonomy western women possessed, for his views concerning the freedoms men enjoyed as they moved west, including the abandonment of many eastern customs and conventions, are not necessarily valid for the women who came west. While his ideas are now somewhat out of vogue, they are still contested by tenacious women's historians, for his very name does cause us to look at women's self-determination.<sup>16</sup> We must recognize that the methods women used to attain, sustain, and express their autonomy revealed a great deal about them and the social structure within which they resided. A woman's values, gender role, and ability to adjust were all closely connected to her sense of autonomy, and it is imperative that the historian recognize this relationship.

In *The Majority Finds Its Past*, Gerda Lerner implies that a woman's autonomy rests on her ability to operate in a world defined, directed, and monopolized by men without having to forfeit her true sense of self.<sup>17</sup> By excavating

within the parameters of a woman's marriage, family, social group, and her society's gender roles, we should be able to uncover the extent of her autonomy. Because inner-direction and self-determination say so much about our internal schemata of values and self-esteem and tend to have such a powerful influence on our actions and reactions, the assessment of a woman's sense of autonomy is integral to any study.

To study an individual western woman, then, we might investigate her values, her gender role within society, and her capacity for adjustment. While considering each, we must ever be mindful of the degree of autonomy she held and the impact of that sense of autonomy on her values, role and adaptability. There are other equally valuable viewpoints we could use to examine western women, but for this study, these should provide fertile ground for the exploration of one woman's life. Eventually, out of the tapestry of many such stories, we shall have a new West.

\* \* \*

Nellie Browne, a Dillon area ranchwife from the turn of the century, was a woman with a story to tell. Her life in rural western Montana furnishes historians with a plethora of data concerning one white, upper middle-class, socially favored woman who coped with family mental illness, financial misfortune, and the dissolution of close family

relationships. The temptation to sensationalize Nellie's story is strong, for it reads like a soap opera, in which one misfortune follows another, to the inevitable unhappy ending. All of the requisite elements of misadventure and calamity are present. Hollywood script writers would have a field day.

Such an approach would be a terrible mistake, for it would be misleading and certainly demeaning to Nellie, and she deserves better treatment. It would cheapen her history and cheat us from all she has to offer. Nellie's life is rich with multifaceted and fascinating interactions. She provides us with a glimpse of a woman caught between eras: too late to be a Victorian Wife, too early to be a New Woman. Her unbounded generosity was tempered by her straight-forward approach to life and her matter-of-fact attitude with others. She was without economic common sense, yet approached her brother's and her husband's mental illnesses with astounding pragmatism and rationality. She was raised and educated to take her place in upper middle-class urban society, but married into a different role as an isolated Montana ranch wife. The contradictions and conflicts in her life and the methods she used to balance and resolve them provide us with an understanding of the resources she discovered within herself and her society at that time. Nellie is both a riveting subject for study and a window to her society.

Background material is indispensable as it forms a cornerstone from which to proceed. The trick is to refrain from becoming mired in it. Therefore, a biographical sketch of Nellie and her husband will be limited to the first chapter. The result may be a somewhat stark and unembellished summary of their lives, but it will supply us with the infrastructure essential to our comprehending the actions, values, and behaviors of both Nellie and her husband, Joseph, as in the chapters that follow, I take them back through the events. After laying a foundation, then, I will attempt to reveal the essence of Nellie by exploring her values, her gendered place in society, the manner in which she developed a sense of autonomy, and her responses to the changes that occurred in her life, as these both enhanced and threatened her autonomy.

In general, the chapters that ensue will also constitute a roughly chronological treatment-in-depth of Nellie's life. In the second chapter, I intend to limit myself to an examination of Nellie's value system as it stood in her young adulthood, and address the changes that occurred to it in a later chapter. Nellie's values concerning home, marriage, religion, and relationships and her modes of expression can provide us with evidences of her personal definition of society and morality. Influences upon her value system would have come from locally accepted social mores, her upbringing within the Catholic Church,

parental modeling, and her educational experiences, so these will be contemplated in light of their effect on her behavior.

An awareness of our gendered roles within the social hierarchy contributes to our personal and social expectations. Nellie's role expectations will be explored next, as they pertained to her nascent adulthood, and as they fit within the gender role ideals of her time. More importantly, a study of her ability to make the transition from an urban role to a more rural one will reveal the extent of her maturity and the strength of her value system as they interacted with her actual situation, so this will become the major focus in the third chapter.

The final chapter will consist of an appraisal of the deepest crises that took place in Nellie's life and of how she chose to react to them. Indications of deeper psychological responses will be probed along with their potential for functioning as a catalyst for additional behavioral changes. As she grew older, Nellie had to cope with the mental illnesses of both her husband and brother. A study of her responses to these illnesses will be of greater value if we can compare them to the views of the greater society. It is therefore important not to limit ourselves to a scrutiny of her reactions to this circumstance, but also to include familial and societal responses within the historical context. We may find that



changes in Nellie's life initiated a chain reaction that affected her value system, her sense of place within society, and her autonomy.

In my attempt not only to tell Nellie Browne's story, but also to integrate her within a broader historical panorama, I heed Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's call for more women's stories. Nellie will reveal herself through anecdotal episodes that, when woven into the warp of the biographical sketch, and the weft of the ensuing chapters, will combine to form a complete, multi-faceted story. As Eudora Welty wrote, "The story offers details, textures, subtlety, that become the fabric for large insights."<sup>18</sup> This means we can use the various scenes from Nellie's life to deepen our awareness of white women's status in the rural West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

What will we learn from Nellie? We may discover that the women of Nellie's generation operated within a transitional set of gender roles that was different from those of the generations that preceded or succeeded them, roles which offered both opportunity and difficulty. It is also possible that Nellie will enable us to appreciate better the effect mental illness had upon her society at large and upon its affected individuals and their families. Lastly, Nellie's story may help us to increase our understanding of women of American West, the women whose

upbringings developed one set of expectations, and whose lives delivered something quite different. Viewed in that light, her story has a commonality with the stories of thousands of other women who came before and since.

ENDNOTES

1. Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, "Balm in Gilead", paper presented as part of the radio program *Speaker's Corner with Roger Mudd* to the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago. Cassette. Produced by the Wm. Benton Broadcast Project of the University of Chicago and Radio Smithsonian/Smithsonian Institution, University of Oxford, 1991.
2. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, ed., *The Women's West* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 9.
3. Ibid., 9-10.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. Ibid., 14.
6. Ibid., 3-5.
7. *Speaker's Corner*.
8. Glenda Riley, Talk presented as part of the Plenary "Contested Space, Common Identities" at the Fourth Conference of the Coalition for Western Women's History, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, 23 July 1992.
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10. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 145-59.
11. Ibid., 168-80.
12. Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*, as noted by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot in *Speaker's Corner*.
13. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *The Gold Rush Widows of Little Falls* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990).
14. Mary Ronan, *Frontier Woman* (Missoula: University of Montana, 1973).
15. Mrs. Nat Collins, *The Cattle Queen of Montana* (Spokane, Washington: Dyer Printing Co., n.d.).

16. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894; Anne M. Butler, "Through a Lens Less Turnerian: Women on the Frontier", *Reviews in American History*, 17:3 (September 1989): 417-23; Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 1-13.
17. *The Majority Finds Its Past*, 148.
18. *One Writer's Beginnings*.

## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHY

During the post-Civil War era, the population of the nation bloomed. Immigrants, lured by the opportunities in what appeared to be an economic paradise, landed on the east coast in droves. By 1900, the U.S. population had reached 75 million. Crowded eastern conditions and visions of glittering wealth lying in the bottom of creek beds caused many families to pack their bags and head west. The Dulleas and the Brownes were two of these families. They reached Montana at a time when the promise of fulfilling dreams of prosperity and prominence was at its strongest. Offspring from each of these families were destined to meet, marry, and discover that, while their parents' dreams did evolve into actualities, like all dreams, they were ephemeral.

#### I

Helen Jane Dullea entered the world on the twenty-first of September in 1880. Her parents, John Francis and Mary Elizabeth Dullea were second-generation Americans of Irish descent. They were also both faithful Catholics. Though Helen was born in Brasher Falls, a small rural community in upstate New York, she did not develop any ties to her

birthplace, for within months of her birth, her father packed up the family and moved west. His older brother, Dennis Dullea, had successfully established himself in Virginia City, Montana, eight years earlier. John Dullea and his family arrived in Virginia City during the winter of 1880, and there he mined for a few months before moving on to Silver Star, a small community north of present day Twin Bridges. John purchased a hotel, a livery, and a small cabin. The family moved into the cabin and John applied himself to the task of becoming a prosperous merchant. He opened a general store in Silver Star in 1891 and proceeded on to nearby Twin Bridges in 1899, where he constructed a brick business block which housed his own store and several other firms as well.<sup>1</sup> Helen reached maturity in Silver Star with three siblings; two older, Katherine, born a year after her parents' marriage in 1876, and John Robert, whose arrival coincided with his parents' third wedding anniversary, October 22, 1878, and finally, the much younger Clarence, who was born in Silver Star in 1891. Mary was 39 at the time of Clarence's birth, and it is possible that complications accompanied his delivery. At any rate, Clarence was mentally handicapped, and when he was 24, the courts decreed him an incompetent because "during all his life, he [had] been of weak mind and totally unfit and unable to attend business affairs or to handle his own business." After a consultation between the Dullea children

and their mother, it was decided that Helen was most qualified to serve in the capacity as his legal guardian.<sup>2</sup> Clarence was later committed to the Montana State Hospital for the Insane at Warm Springs where he lived the last decade of his life. He died in 1943 at age 52.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of relocating his family in Twin Bridges after he built his business block, John Dullea decided to maintain two residences. Mary Dullea remained in Silver Star while her husband looked after the store in Twin Bridges. The children were raised in Silver Star and attended school locally.<sup>4</sup> The three older Dullea children then attended Catholic boarding schools in Salt Lake City.

Katherine graduated from St. Mary's Academy where she received an education in liberal arts. She was an especially gifted musician. She married Dr. John J. Mahoney of Virginia City in 1903, and within two years moved with him to St. Louis where she matriculated into medical school.<sup>5</sup> After her graduation, they moved to Portland where they each set up a practice, his as a general practitioner, hers as an oculist. They had four children.

John Robert attended All Hallow's College in Salt Lake City, a federally approved military school specializing in courses on mining, engineering, chemistry and physics.<sup>6</sup> He then returned home to join his father in operating the expanding and diversified family businesses. He never married, and at the time of his death in 1940 he had amassed

considerable wealth.<sup>7</sup>

Helen, or Nellie as she was called by her family and friends, also graduated from St. Mary's Academy, in her case in 1902. She was an excellent student, and her curriculum included music, art, academic and commercial courses.<sup>8</sup> The three older Dullea children began their adult lives with all of the benefits of family reputability, social acceptance, a prestigious education, and financial security.

John Dullea, Sr. was a prudent and astute property manager. He died in 1913 leaving his family an estate worth over \$15,000.00 with rents on his real estate bringing in \$5000, annually. His widow, Mary, did not have the same educational opportunities as her children; nonetheless, she possessed a sound business acumen and, even though she and her two daughters sold three real estate holdings which included two town lots in Twin Bridges and a ranch near Silver Star, she was able to support herself on the remainder of her husband's estate. Additionally, she had the financial means to make loans to her daughters and two other business associates that totaled \$9,660. She died twenty years after John in 1933 and left to Katherine, Nellie, and Clarence an estate valued at almost \$19,000.00. This figure does not include an \$8,000 mortgage loan made to Nellie and her husband that Mary forgave in her will. Older son John was not one of Mary's designated heirs as it was agreed upon by all members of the Dullea family that he not



have a financial share in her estate. He later purchased the store and business building in Twin Bridges from Mary, Katherine, and Nellie.<sup>9</sup> John and Mary Dullea, through careful use of their resources and as a result of astute business investments, had made a good living from the considerable and varied business opportunities that Montana had provided.

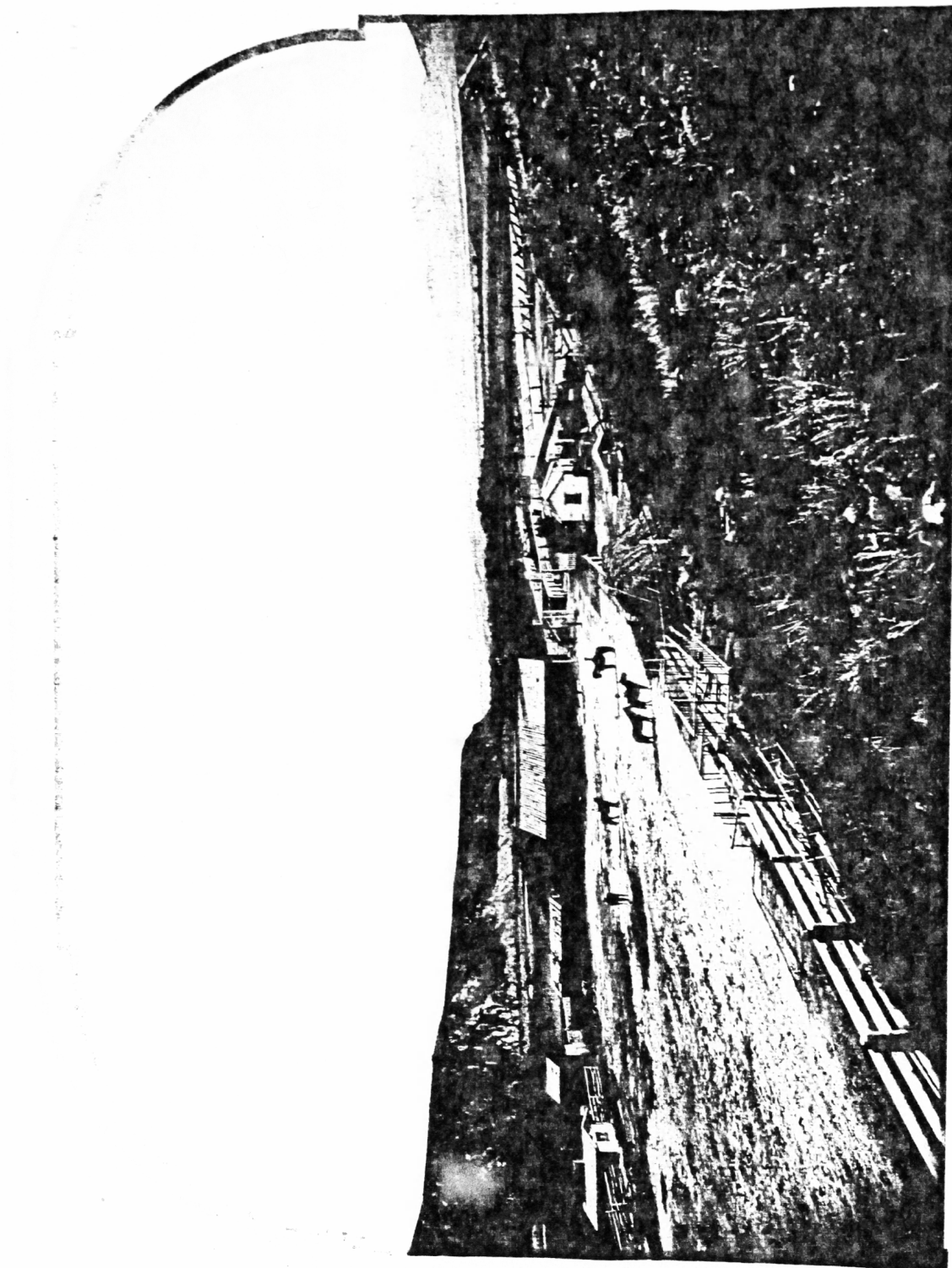
## II

Across the Highland Mountains, southwest of Silver Star, Joseph Aloysius Browne had worked to establish his own success story. Joseph was born in Washington County, Pennsylvania, in 1831. His parents were immigrants from Ireland who came to America shortly before he was born, and like the Dulleas, well before the flood of poor Irish who came to escape the famines of the 1840s. They were also devout Catholics. Joseph received his education at St. Francis College, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, and after laboring as a bookkeeper for a few years, he decided to head West to investigate its rumored opportunities. He arrived in Montana in 1862 and immediately secured what was demonstrated to be a fruitful mining claim in Bannack. After collecting approximately \$2,000 from the mine, he sold it and moved on to Argenta, where he located a silver mine, and then to the Deer Lodge Valley. There in Nugget Gulch he extracted \$10,000 worth of ore, sold out, and returned to

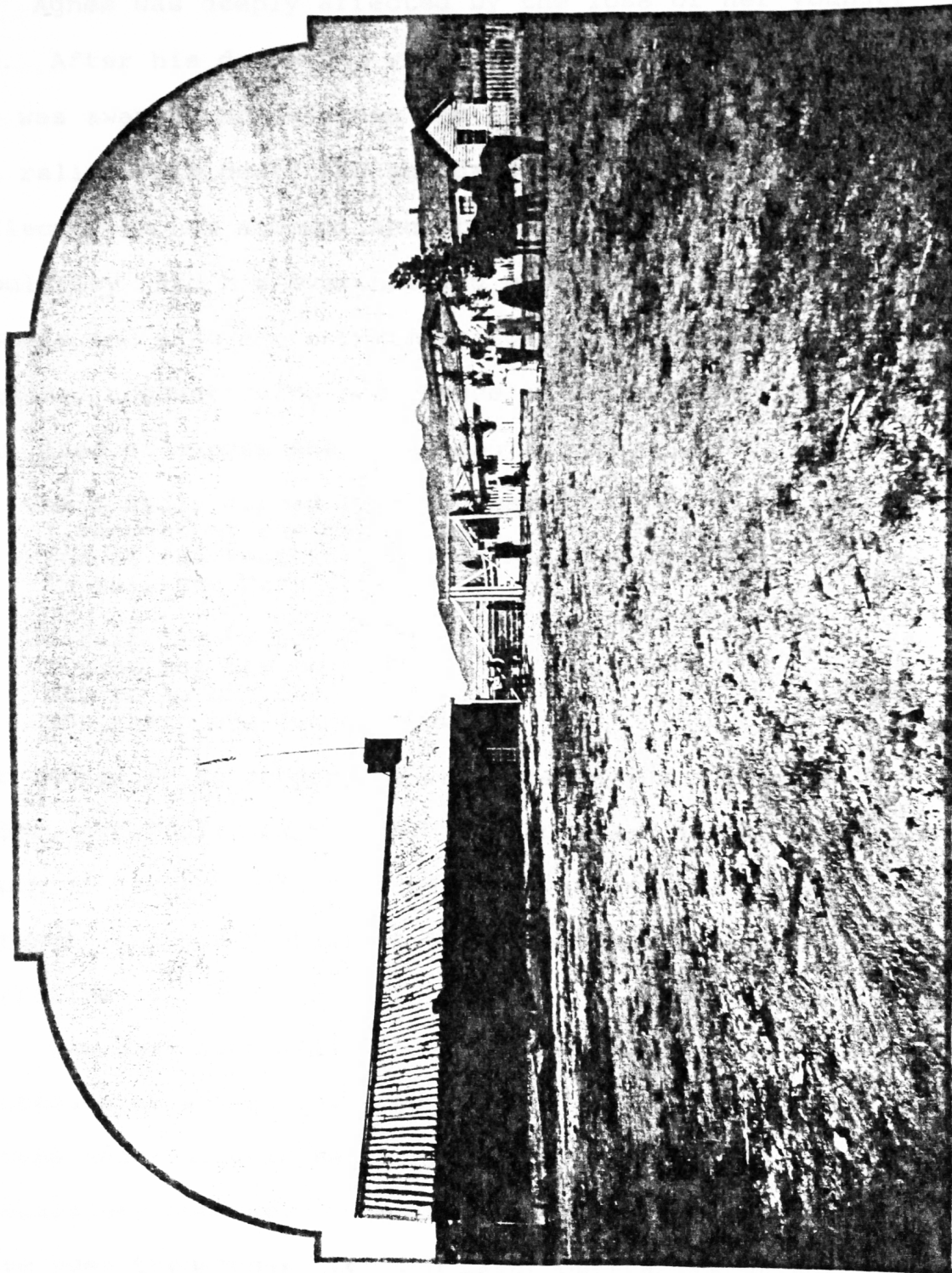
the Beaverhead Valley.

In 1870 he used his mining profits to purchase the Big Hole toll-road and bridge near Melrose and a ranch that was eventually to grow to 3000 acres. On a bluff overlooking the bridge, Joseph constructed a ranch house with barn, corrals, and outbuildings, and then headed east to marry.

Agnes M. Murray of Dubuque, Iowa, wed Joseph on April 9, 1872. Their honeymoon took them west to the ranch where they settled down to a life of managing the ranch and their mining holdings. There, they raised a family. Four children were born to the Brownes over a span of nine years: Mary Ellen, the eldest, in 1873, less than a year after Joseph and Agnes were married; Joseph Aloysius, Jr., on March 28, 1875; Frances Teresa, or Fannie, in 1880; and finally, Francis Vincent in 1881. All of them received local schooling and were then dispatched to Salt Lake City and its Catholic boarding schools. Mary and Fannie enrolled at St. Mary's Academy, while Joseph and Francis attended All Hallow's College.<sup>10</sup> Francis was an outstanding student, but never completed his education. During Christmas break in 1900 while visiting with friends in Butte, young Francis accidentally came in contact with a live wire and was electrocuted. He had been a popular young man, a favorite among Butte's youthful elites, and his death elicited tributes and expressions of sympathy.<sup>11</sup>



1. Browne Ranch, view facing south. Bradley Collection



2. Browne Ranch, view from yard, facing west. Bradley Collection

Agnes was deeply affected by the loss of her younger son. After his death she wrote a lengthy letter to Fannie, who was away at school when the accident occurred, in which she relived his death and the days prior to it. She reflected on his accomplishments, his sensitivity, his popularity, and his overwhelming promise. She revealed her despair and also her commitment to her Catholic faith which required unquestioning acceptance of God's decisions in a few lines of a poem she wrote and included in the letter:

As I sadly turned from the casement  
I thought of the Master dear  
And of the task that He has given to me  
In this the Holy year,

I felt I dare not question  
I must not try to know  
Why to me has been given  
The sharp and sudden blow.<sup>12</sup>

Her letter is an account of one woman's journey through grief, powerfully expressed. It captures for the reader the depth of her anguish and creates a realization of the strength she had to possess to write such a painful narrative.

She also memorialized her youngest child and his successes at All Hallow's College by establishing The Frank Browne Memorial Gold Medal award for elocution in preparatory courses.<sup>13</sup> The impact of Francis's death must have been tremendous, for the later obituaries of both Joseph, Sr. and Agnes included a description of the accident. In addition, every person interviewed for this

project retold the story. Joseph was living at home with his parents at the time, and one must wonder what lasting effect the death of Francis had on him.<sup>14</sup>

Like the three older Dullea children, the three remaining Browne children were the recipients of all of the advantages that accompanied a prestigious education, prosperity, and social respectability. In 1897 the elder daughter, Mary, married successful cattleman Frank Hagenbarth. They moved to Salt Lake City and later to Spencer, Idaho, where they established a cattle ranching empire. Mary and Frank had four children and their descendants still ranch in the Beaverhead Valley today. Joseph returned from college and settled down, under his father's scrutinizing eyes, to develop the proficiencies and intuitions essential for successful ranching. Fannie remained at home until after the death of both her parents. She eventually married Robert Bryant from California who also became involved in the cattle business. They had only one child, a son named for his father, who grew up and made his home in Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup>

Agnes Browne survived her younger son by just three years. In 1903 she succumbed to severe stomach disorders and died after an operation in Holy Cross Hospital, Salt Lake City. Her estate consisted of title to 400 acres of ranch property and interests in two placer mines. She left no will, so her holdings were distributed with one third

going to her husband and the remainder being divided among her children.<sup>16</sup> Agnes lived in Montana during a venturesome era. She was not daunted by the threat of Indian attacks or pioneer hardships. The greatest challenge she had to face was contending with the loss of her youngest child.

Shortly after her death, Joseph Sr. started divesting himself of his property. In 1904 he transferred title to an undivided one-third interest in 3000 acres to his son, Joseph Jr. Two years later father and son consolidated the entire 3000 acres into the Browne Ranch Company, Limited, an incorporated partnership consisting of Joseph Jr., Frank Hagenbarth, H. C. Wood (Frank's stepfather), and two other minor investors. Frank Hagenbarth was made president.<sup>17</sup>

Joseph Sr. died in 1906 in the Mayo Brothers Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, following a year of health problems and repeated hospitalizations in Salt Lake City.<sup>18</sup> His daughter Mary, through her marriage to Hagenbarth, and his son Joseph were provided for through their partnership with the Browne Ranch Company, Ltd.\* Joseph was financially secure, but not quite his own man. His ranch management was under the direction of the partnership.

Like John and Mary Dullea, Joseph and Agnes Browne had done well for themselves in Montana. They were widely

*\*There is no indication, other than a \$100 bequest mentioned in his will, that Joseph Sr. gave his daughter Fannie a share of anything.*

recognized and esteemed. They had carved a spot for themselves in the annals of Montana history and had secured every possible advantage for their children.

### III

It was inevitable that Nellie and Joseph become acquainted. They came from notable families who held common ethnic and religious beliefs and political affiliations. Their fathers were both vigorous Democrats with John Dullea active at the local level and Joseph Browne at the Territorial level<sup>19</sup>. The children attended the same schools. They moved in the same social circles. Ranching business occasionally took Joseph to Twin Bridges, but it was not long before his visits adopted a different nature.

After Nellie returned from St. Mary's Academy, the local papers began noting Joseph's frequent presence in town. He stayed with the Dulleas as their guest and made certain he was in town for as many as possible of the Dullea girls' feted entertainments.<sup>20</sup> A foursome was developed consisting of Joseph, Nellie, her sister Katherine, and Dr. John Mahoney of Virginia City. At the wedding of Katherine and John in 1903, Joseph and Helen served as witnesses for the couple. After two years of courtship which involved numerous visits, entertainments, and interactions between their families, Joseph and Nellie were married on May 18, 1904 in Nellie's home in Twin Bridges. After a honeymoon in





3. Helen Jane Browne on her wedding day, 18 May 1904.  
Used with permission of Margaret Hagenbarth.

Salt Lake City, where they stayed as guests of the Hagenbarths, the young couple returned to Montana to apply themselves to the business of ranching.<sup>21</sup>

The Browne Ranch Company, Ltd., was formed in 1906. The company began by issuing 100,000 stock shares of which Hagenbarth controlled 59,873 and Joseph controlled 8,000. The treasury held 20,000 shares and the remaining 3 partners held 12,127.<sup>22</sup>

Evidence indicates that Joseph began chafing at the supervisory bit that Frank Hagenbarth held firmly in place by 1909, and at the directors' meeting in December of 1911 it was mutually agreed upon by all partners that Joseph would sever his ties to the company and ranch on his own. The agreement made at that meeting stated that for \$9,720 Joseph and Nellie would gain title to 960 acres of ranch land, which was divided into two ranches: the Rock Creek Ranch and the Joe Browne Ranch. The properties lie adjacent to one another and are located between present-day Glen and Melrose. In addition, they would own the 73 acres of patented placer land known as the lake property. This consisted of Browne's Lake and Lake Agnes, both located west of the ranches.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph and Nellie came up with the cash by mortgaging their ranches and the lake property to Martha W. Fish of Butte and by signing a promissory note to Nellie's father for a loan of \$4000 at 10% interest.<sup>24</sup> In January of 1912

the Brownes were independent ranchers.

Unfortunately, young Joseph apparently did not have the business head of his father. While he was skilled in many aspects of ranch life, he did not have a knack for managing money. His response to financial predicaments or managerial dilemmas was to take out loans, often using the ranch as collateral, or to lease the ranch to someone else for a year or two when its administration became too stressful, or to sell off some of his land holdings. While the financial records of the years from 1912 to 1917 are incomplete, they adequately illustrate the Brownes' inability to ranch judiciously and wisely in western Montana.

Nellie's father died in August 1913. The settlement of his estate required that the Browne's promissory note, worth \$4044 at the time, be paid up. Joseph took out a loan for \$3000 from the Bank of Twin Bridges to help pay off the note. He and Nellie remortgaged their properties in 1913 to her mother, Mary Dullea, for a loan which they undoubtedly used to pay off Martha Fish.<sup>25</sup> By June 1915 they were making payments on three separate loans; those from the Bank of Twin Bridges and Mary Dullea, and a third from the First National Bank of Dillon. Their monthly bank balances hint at their shaky financial situation for they experienced overdrafts during the months of July, October and November. They ended 1915 by again borrowing; this time it was \$500 from Nellie's brother, John.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph and Nellie began the new year by taking out another loan from John Dullea for \$600 and by purchasing \$1000 worth of cattle. Although grazing land was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain and agricultural prices were artificially inflated because of World War I, the investment was similar to those being made by other ranchers in the Beaverhead. Encouraged to do their patriotic duty by producing their utmost, agriculturists all over the nation were borrowing more and more, assuming monumental debts. The Browne's purchase was probably deemed to be a sound one, considering the spectacular profits ranchers were reaping as a result of the wartime boom.<sup>27</sup> The Brownes ended 1916 by taking out three additional loans at 10% interest, two from the Bank of Twin Bridges which together totalled \$3000, and yet another loan from John Dullea for \$400. They began 1917 owing over \$12,000. During the past year they had increased their indebtedness by \$4000 but had paid only \$1160 on previous loans.<sup>28</sup> At the rate they were borrowing, their defrayment would never match the annual increases in their indebtedness.

Nellie and Joseph apparently knew they were not succeeding as ranchers, for in May 1917 Joseph visited the president of the First National Bank of Dillon, Frank Hazelbaker, in hopes that he could help him find a buyer for the ranches. Hazelbaker contacted Frank Hagenbarth who, in addition to his administrating and shareholding roles in the

Browne Ranch Co., Ltd., was also president of the Wood Livestock and Land Company of Spencer, Idaho. Hagenbarth was willing to help his brother-in-law, and on May 2, 1917, the 480 acre Rock Creek Ranch was deeded to Wood Livestock for \$9,500. In an effort to get themselves out of debt, the Brownes paid nearly \$13,000 on their various loan notes that year.<sup>29</sup>

The difference between the amount of money they received for the sale of the Rock Creek Ranch and that which they applied to their loans has two possible explanations. The Dullea women sold the Twin Bridges store and the ranch at Silver Star early in 1917 for a combined figure of \$8,700.<sup>30</sup> Nellie's share would have been close to \$3000 and could have been used to pay off old debts. The second possible explanation can be derived from a review of the Brownes' bank statements. Notes and interest debits from 1918 indicate that Joseph and Nellie continued to take out more loans after they sold the Rock Creek Ranch. Even with the additional income from loans and the property sale, the Brownes still managed to have a \$170 overdraft in October 1917.<sup>31</sup>

If ever there was an era favorable to ranching, it was the years immediately prior to and during the Great War. Malone and Etulain wrote in *The American West* that between 1914 and 1918 "net profits in constant dollars more than doubled, from \$4 to \$19 billion annually...the nation's

wheatlands increased by twenty-seven million acres....The rural West had never know such prosperity before."<sup>32</sup> All aspects of ranch production saw a dramatic increase in demand and price. "In 1915 cattle averaged \$7.75 a hundredweight, rising to \$14.50 a hundredweight by 1918."<sup>33</sup> Other ranchers in the Beaverhead were increasing the size of their land holdings at this time, and were using mortgages to do so, but the Brownes were not really buying additional acreage. Other than the cattle Joseph purchased in January 1916, there are no records of expansion-related expenditures.\* Joseph and Nellie simply did not know how to ranch. Interviews taken from three people who knew the Brownes include statements that say in a variety of ways that Joseph was not a financially smart rancher.<sup>34</sup>

Besides the mortgages and loans, Joe and Nellie spent their money freely and with what appears to be a drastic lack of foresight. During thirty months between September 1914 and April 1917 for which bank statements are available, their checks to local hardware, grocery, implement, and merchandising establishments totaled \$2125; they purchased a new carpet; they paid over \$507 on insurance policies; phone

\*Slight discrepancies in the legal descriptions of the ranches from 1917 to 1922 seem to indicate that parcels were passed back and forth between Browne and Hagenbarth with the possible addition of 80 acres to Browne's holdings. Even so, if Browne did in fact purchase 80 additional acres, the amount of his loans is far in excess of the \$1,500 such a land purchase would approximately cost.

bills came to \$133; checks sent to Katherine Dullea amounted to \$385; they purchased one of the first automobiles in the valley and frequently spent money for its upkeep.<sup>35</sup> By comparison, many other ranch families in Montana were extremely cautious, knowing that imprudent spending could result in the loss of the ranch.<sup>36</sup> One could say that all of the above listed expenditures were legitimate; that upper-middle class ranchers did purchase carpets, cars, insurance policies, and talk on the telephone. But, Montana ranchers knew that luxuries, such as improvements in the house, often had to wait while earnings were invested back into the ranch. Making the mortgage payment was paramount, and crucial to a family's survival.<sup>37</sup> The Brownes were not accustomed to economizing, as their frequent checks written to Albert Stamm, the jeweler, Jason Donovan, the bar owner, Hennessy Mercantile Co., Brownfield Canty Furniture and Luggage Co., and Montana Auto Supply seem to illustrate. The years of both Joseph's and Nellie's childhood had not been those of want, and they did not learn to pinch pennies after they were married.

After the sale of the Rock Creek Ranch, Joe and Nellie continued to work the remaining 560 acre Joe Browne Ranch. In April 1918 they took out a loan of \$3,700 from the Gallatin Valley National Bank to pay off their debt to the Bank of Twin Bridges. A second loan in July for \$789 was necessary to completely pay off the debt. Payments of

\$2,286 were made on their other debts in 1918. They had sold one of their ranches to get themselves out of debt, yet discovered that their financial predicaments were not behind them. Cancelled checks from their account indicate that the Brownes spent more conservatively during 1918; still, they wrote several checks to purchase beer, car parts, clothes, shoes, specially ordered cutlery from Chicago, and pay for the monthly phone bill.<sup>38</sup> The Brownes could not seem to make the sacrifices necessary to live within their means.

While Joe and Nellie could not make a secure livelihood of ranching, they were not without other economic resources. They had an income through their operation of a resort at Browne's Lake. The resort had been built by Joseph Sr. and had been used to entertain his political friends from Butte. Cabins and a lodge were built overlooking the lake, with a dining hall which extended over the water. Guests took the train to Browne's Station where they were picked up and then transported to the lake. The excellent fishing was legendary, and people coveted a week's vacation at Browne's Lake. Joseph and Nellie turned the resort into a well-paying business. Joseph used a passenger wagon, specially fitted with extra seats, to transport their paying guests to the lake and then furnished them with cabins.

So long as Joe controlled access to the lake, he was in a position to charge for his services. However, modernization and advancements in technology ruined his



monopoly. As more people acquired automobiles, Joseph's services were no longer in as great demand. Fewer people were willing to pay to be transported by horse-drawn wagon and housed in rustic cabins when they could independently drive to the lake and camp out in tents, free of charge.<sup>39</sup> Receipts dropped off, leaving Joe and Nellie with a choice of either drastically altering their ranch management and lifestyle or of selling out.

The first three months of 1919 saw the Brownes' debits greater than their credits. They felt further financial pressure in March when a \$3,144 loan note came due on the 15th. On the first of April they signed a deed of sale with two shearherders, Clark D. McKown and James R. Crook, for the Joe Browne Ranch. The price was \$20,000 with \$5,000 down and \$15,000 payable over the following seven years.<sup>40</sup> The same day the Brownes sold the ranch they borrowed \$8,000 from Mary Dullea and gave her a promissory note in exchange. That month Joseph had \$6,605 deducted from his account to meet bank note obligations.<sup>41</sup>

While Joseph had been working on the ranch sale, Nellie had been looking for a place for them to live. She found one in Portland, Oregon, close to her sister, Katherine. In March of 1919 Nellie moved to Portland and began to establish their new home.

Joseph remained in Montana to tie up loose ends. In July he sold the 73 acres containing Browne's Lake and its

resort and Lake Agnes to four business acquaintances: W. B. Hartwig, H. L. McCaleb, H. S. Gimble, and George Hughes. The men believed they could develop the property into a profitable resort area. They invested heavily in improvements and waited for the cash to pour in.<sup>42</sup> They did not anticipate the devastating economic recession in the Beaverhead Valley which began in the fall of 1919. Ranchers suffered successive blows from drought, grasshoppers, winter blizzards, and a drop in land values. The increase in mortgage indebtedness that had accompanied the rise in prices from the war years left many agriculturists "worse than broke".<sup>43</sup> Money was not readily available for vacations at resorts. Joe and Nellie sold out at an advantageous time, but it was because they went broke earlier than most, not because of financial astuteness.

The only remaining ties the Brownes had to Montana were a one-half interest in the Faithful Lode mine, a claim located in Vipond that Joseph owned jointly with his brother-in-law, John Dullea, a promissory note held by Mary Dullea that continued to require regular payments, a \$15,000 note carried on the ranch for McKown and Crook, and the Browne's Lake deed carried for Hartwig, McCaleb, Gimble and Hughes.<sup>44\*</sup> Joseph and Nellie had lived almost their entire

*\*While there is no legal evidence available that states the sale price of the lake property, letters written to Joseph by McCaleb indicate it was \$2,500.*

lives in Montana but left with no appreciable signs of regret.

#### IV

Nellie and Joseph took little of their old way of life with them when they moved to Portland. They purchased a large and impressive-looking house on E. 39th Street, one block from Katherine's home.<sup>45</sup> They then spent time and considerable money at the local furniture stores and department stores making it liveable. Once their house was furnished, they lived an economical existence in their new surroundings, buying only the necessary essentials.<sup>46</sup> This judicious lifestyle was not to be a permanent one. It lasted only until the commencement of the new year.

By January of 1920 the Brownes began to establish new patterns of living, attitudes, preferences and spending. They developed satisfying relationships with friends with whom they maintained contact for years. They traveled and saw the sights. And, they invested in a money-making venture that had nothing to do with ranching. Joseph invested \$3,315 in a gum vending business which operated the gum dispensing vending machines in Portland. The cash for his initial investment may have come from loans, for in 1920 he paid \$1,911 on notes that were not specifically for either his Portland house payment or for the mortgage to Mary Dullea. An additional \$2,987 was invested in the gum

business during the year.<sup>47</sup> There is no indication in the bank statements as to whether or not the gum business was profitable, but during their stay in Portland the Brownes had plenty of money in their account and spent it more freely than ever before.

The way they spent money also changed in Portland. While living on the ranch, the Brownes had written checks to specific establishments and only occasionally wrote a check for cash. A review of their bank statements and cancelled checks makes it possible to quickly determine how and where their money was spent. In Portland they continued to write specific checks for groceries, rent, gas and car expenses, coal and wood, phone bills and other necessities, but they also began to write numerous checks to themselves for the purpose of acquiring ready cash. Using cash makes spending easier than writing checks and it also makes accounting for expenditures more difficult, for oneself as well as for others. During the three years the Brownes lived in Portland, they spent over \$4300 on untraceable, miscellaneous expenditures.<sup>48</sup>

Life in Portland was a pleasant reprieve from the stresses and constant financial pressures of ranch life. If Nellie and Joseph could have maintained the existence they enjoyed in 1920, their lives would undoubtedly have been less painful. It is possible that the gum machine investments would have subsidized their lifestyle and

enabled them to break free of their reliance on taking out loans. They did not have the opportunity to find out, however, for by the time the year ended hints of future obstacles loomed on the horizon.

Joseph and Nellie had enjoyed what could be termed good health while they lived on the ranch. Nellie did have teeth problems, necessitating semi-annual visits to Dr. Rathbone, Dillon's dentist, and she spent over three months in Portland during the winter of 1916 for health-related reasons, but other than that, the couple's visits to doctors were infrequent.<sup>49</sup> They had not had any children. Their physical ailments were usually of the type that could be cured by staying in bed for a day or two.

While living in Portland, Joseph began experiencing stomach and gall bladder problems. He was hospitalized during July and August of 1921, and again in February of 1922. On all three visits he underwent major surgery with all its accompanying x-rays, rehabilitations, and recovery periods. He also required private nursing after each operation. For almost four months, Joseph was incapacitated.<sup>50</sup>

During the same period, Joseph and Nellie began receiving unpleasant news from Dillon. In September of 1920 a letter arrived from Mr. McCaleb which stated that in regards to the letter Mr. Hartwig received from Joseph concerning a \$500 overdue payment on the lakes property, it

was "a physical impossibility to beg, borrow or steal money here this year." Sheep prices were down after the "hardest winter known in this country."<sup>51</sup> The men were behind in their mortgage, but Hughes hoped for a good price on lambs, which would indicate an improvement for all in the Dillon area economy.

Eight months later, shortly before his first surgery, Joseph received a letter from McKown and Crook. They were dismayed to report that they had not been able to send him the mortgage payment because of state-wide economic woes. The situation was so bad that "everybody in this country is doing business on I owe you plan." They suggested that money might be forthcoming a little later, but the tone was not at all optimistic.<sup>52</sup>

Just one month later, on the 24th of June, a letter arrived from Frank Hagenbarth. The Wood Livestock Company filed suit against a neighboring rancher over disputed water rights.<sup>53</sup> Joseph was needed at the trial as a witness as the water in question from Lost Creek was originally claimed by Joseph Browne, Sr. for both the Rock Creek and Joe Browne ranches. McKown and Crook were involved from that standpoint and needed Joseph's testimony. The trial was scheduled for July, and while Joseph did manage to get his testimony to Dillon, he spent much of that month either in St. Vincent's Hospital or at home, convalescing.<sup>54</sup> The ensuing four months of recuperation were quiet ones. Nellie

shopped a little and Joseph worked on an invention he wanted to patent, but most of the time was probably spent regaining lost strength.<sup>55</sup>

During November Joseph again heard from Hughes and McCaleb Paints on behalf of themselves, Mr. Gimble and Mr. Hartwig in relation to the mortgage on the lake property. They claimed that because the country was in poor economic shape with everyone straining his or her budget, it was impossible for them to meet their obligation at that time. They even went so far as to claim that the lake was "a lemon of the first water and would not pay interest on a third of the amount" for which it had been sold.<sup>56</sup> As they entered the winter of 1921, Joseph and Nellie were not receiving payments on either of the mortgages they were carrying.

Joseph contacted their lawyer in Dillon concerning the situation of their debtors in Montana. By mid-December they had their options neatly spelled out for them. John Collins, from the firm of Norris, Hurd, and Collins, informed them that not only did McKown and Crook not have any money, they had no property of any value that could be claimed in foreclosure. Furthermore, because the economic climate in Montana was not positive, Collins doubted that the Brownes "could find anyone else to step in and take their place on short notice." He suggested that Joseph file a chattel mortgage on McKown and Crook's crop for the year of 1922 to prevent other creditors from suing for their

debts first. This meant that the ranch would revert to the Brownes and they would have to return to Montana to operate it. Collins' advice to Joseph concerning the complaints of Hartwig, McCaleb, Gimble and Hughes was that because the men were "as solvent as anybody else in the country," there was no reason to discount the note on the lake property. They should be held to the terms of the sale agreement.<sup>57</sup>

His letter gave Joseph and Nellie much to discuss. They had little reason to believe that the economic climate in Montana would improve appreciably within the next several months, and their choices were to either wait for a change in Montana's financial situation, or foreclose on the loans. They foreclosed.

## V

Joseph set off for Dillon in the spring of 1922 to begin the arduous and disappointing task of resuming a life of ranching. Helen remained in Portland to sell their comfortable home, pack their belongings, and move the household back to Browne's Ranch. She sold the house and furniture in June, shipped the Browne belongings to Montana in July, and rejoined her husband in September.<sup>58</sup> The return could not have been made with ease or satisfaction. The Brownes relinquished a life they greatly enjoyed. Their home in Portland was modern, newly furnished, equipped with conveniences that made possible leisure time. Portland had



electricity, Melrose did not.

One of Joseph's first actions upon his return was to remortgage the ranch to Mary Dullea as security for the promissory note written in April 1919 for the \$8,000 loan. Although their interest payments made on the mortgage from 1922 to 1933 totalled \$5,250, they never diminished the principle. Mary forgave their debt after her death in 1933 according to the terms in her will.<sup>59</sup>

The financial accounts for 1922 after the Brownes returned to Melrose are somewhat confusing. Their account was credited with \$12,840, yet the income from the ranch was probably less than \$2,500 (*see below for reference to 1923 tax form*). The sale of the Portland house realized a credit of \$3544 for that year, but there is no clue as to the source of the approximate remaining \$5,300.<sup>60</sup> Joseph may have taken out additional loans, or perhaps profits from the gum business made up the difference. The important point is that because their debits for that same period came to \$10,433, they were living far beyond their means as ranchers.

Their 1923 income tax form shows a loss on the ranch of \$568.72. Income from the sales of wheat, hay, pasture rental, and butter and eggs brought in \$2,701. Expenses for hired help, purchased hay, seed, fuel, taxes, car and machinery depreciation, interest on the mortgage, and water rights amounted to \$3,269. Hired help wages alone amounted

to \$1,251 with deductions for the help's board totaling \$268.50. The allowable board deduction was \$.50 per day, so the total deduction represents 537 days of hired labor. Twenty-four individuals were hired, with the duration of employment ranging from one day to four and a half months.<sup>61</sup> It is true that all haying was done by hand, and that the majority of the Brownes' income that year came from the sale of hay, but the expense for help still seems excessive. One worker who assisted Nellie in the house during the summer of 1924 claimed that the Brownes "always had more men working in the hayfields than any average ranch did."<sup>62</sup> They simply had no idea of how to ranch efficiently.

Money deposited to the Brownes' account in 1923 totaled \$9,782. This came from a couple of sources. Payments made to Brownes for their sale of the house in Portland came to \$4,089 that year. In addition the lake property mortgage was finally paid. McCaleb, Hughes, Gimble, and Hartwig met their obligations with a deposit of \$2,000 to the Brownes' account in September.<sup>63</sup> Financially, the Brownes did well in a year when other ranchers struggled. And they did it apparently without taking on additional indebtedness. However, two thirds of their income that year was from property sales and could not be counted upon the following year.

Their spending habits, never cautious prior to their living in Portland, became more extravagant after they

returned. It almost appears as if the Brownes attempted to make up for their disappointment at having to return to the ranch by buying things. Within a month of his return, Joseph purchased a new 1922 Buick touring model, raising eyebrows all around the neighborhood. Within two months of her return, Nellie redecorated the parlor, purchasing a beautiful red carpet and a set of floor-length lace curtains. Joseph spent over \$400 on more farming machinery. Nellie attended the vaudeville theater and frequented clothing stores, even though she had trunks of beautiful clothes from Portland. Nellie was so delighted with the new carpet, she purchased one for the church. Joseph continued the habit he and Nellie had adopted in Portland of providing themselves with ready cash by writing checks to himself at the Metals Bank and Trust in Butte. From the time of Joseph's return to Beaverhead County in April 1922 to December 1924 the couple managed to spend \$26,748.<sup>64</sup>

This figure is so far above what one could make on a 560 acre ranch in the 1920s the question to be asked is where did they get this amount of money? Once again, loans provide at least part of the answer. The Brownes paid \$913 on bank notes in 1924. This amount does not include the \$340 paid on the mortgage to Mary Dullea. With their account showing a balance of less than \$50 at the end of the year Joseph took out a \$1,500 loan on his insurance policy from The Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York and he

and Nellie decided to get out of the ranching business yet again.

They leased the ranch to Fay Gransbery, a local rancher who desired to make use of the water rights that were included in the lease.<sup>65</sup> Joseph and Nellie moved out of the ranch house and into a small cabin in the back of the yard.<sup>66</sup> Just three years previously, their life together had been one of social engagements, travel, friends, and easy living. In 1925 they did not even live in their own home.

Joseph's health problems began to flair again. A medical examination provided to Joseph by the Equitable Life Assurance Society shows evidence that he suffered from undiagnosed diabetes. He was passing sugar in his urine. This most likely accounts for his slight body weight in spite of the abundant diet Nellie provided for him. He also experienced an increase in digestive-related ailments.<sup>67</sup> The Brownes were undergoing a variety of stresses at this time and Joseph's health was paying the price.

In addition to their financial difficulties, Nellie's sister, Katherine, was putting their life on an emotional rollercoaster as well. She had been placed in a sanitarium in 1919, apparently for treatment of a nervous condition. Then in 1923 she was sent by her family to the Hamilton Narcotic Institute for treatment of chemical addiction. The Brownes generously paid both bills, but Katherine did not appreciate their interference. She believed them to be

responsible for much of the familial censure she endured during that time.<sup>68</sup> The sensitive situation left a permanent scar on the sisters' relationship and will be discussed at greater length in another chapter.

Joseph was also trying to market a stone-raker, a farm implement he had invented and patented while living in Portland.<sup>69</sup> Several patent attorneys and manufacturing companies solicited the rights to his patent, but he finally settled on the Ramsey Company, patent attorneys in Ottawa, Canada. After investing in his creation, its patent, and the legal rights to it, Joseph contracted with The Canadian Automatic Churn Co. to manufacture and market his invention.

In early March of 1927 Joseph received daunting news; his stone raker was not attracting interest. Furthermore, the sales and marketing department asked Joseph to help defray the considerable advertising costs by sending money.<sup>70</sup> Joseph lost his grip on reality. He had suffered too much disappointment and stress. His life had been spent trying to successfully manage the properties inherited from his father, but he discovered that while what his father touched turned to gold, his touch led to failure. He temporarily became insane.



4. Joseph Aloysius Browne, undated. Bradley Collection

## VI

Joseph spent three and a half months in the Montana State Hospital for the Insane at Warm Springs. He was committed by court order on March 10, 1927, and was paroled on July 1. Upon his release, he and Nellie moved to her old family home in Silver Star.<sup>71</sup> There, while living with Nellie's mother, they attempted to heal their strained emotions and regain some financial security. As the year drew to a close, Joseph began looking for work and Nellie investigated the possibility of taking in home work. She wrote to the American Monogram Company and discovered that by sewing monograms for shirts or sweaters she could make \$3.00 a dozen.<sup>72</sup> Recognizing the recompense as being pitifully low, Nellie passed up the opportunity. The year ended quietly. The aspirations and goals the Brownes must have set twenty-three years earlier when they first began their married life could not possibly have included the actualities of their lives.

Joseph and Nellie began to take control of their lives again in 1928. They filed a petition to discharge Nellie as Joseph's guardian and to re-establish him as a competent person.<sup>73</sup> They also had their long-time attorney, John Collins, draw up a legal lease agreement between themselves and Val Tadevich, a local rancher who placed as much value on Browne's water rights as he did on the fields.<sup>74</sup> The contract had essentially the same terms as the one made with

Fay Gransbery in 1925. Leasing the ranch accomplished the joint goals of freeing Joseph from the pressures of ranching in an economically difficult era and of guaranteeing him a modest annual income of \$1,000 from the rents.

Realizing that they would not return to ranch life, Joseph and Nellie searched for a buyer. They set the price at \$20,000, the same as it was nine years earlier in the aborted sale to McKown and Crook, and contacted several realty companies. These responded with expressions of great interest, but not one produced a buyer.<sup>75</sup> Having no choice but to continue at status quo, the Brownes renewed the Tadeviches' lease for 1929 and waited for their lives to improve.

Living in the Dullea home could not have been easy for the Brownes. Mary was an assertive woman and her relationships with her children did not always run smoothly. Nellie's brother, Clarence, grew increasingly difficult and violent as the years passed. His presence was possibly a constant reminder to Joseph of the potential resurgence of his own psychological instability. They decided to move out on their own, once again, and looked to Butte for their fresh start.

On the hill near the downtown area they found the first of several small homes they were to occupy in Butte. Joseph found a job working in the Emma mine where he was employed from 1929 to 1935. Nellie kept house in the various



dwellings they rented; three places their first year.<sup>76</sup>

Seven years earlier they had owned a grand handsome house in one of Portland's nicer neighborhoods and were self-employed. The memory had to contrast bitterly with the reality of their cramped, noisy rentals and of Joseph's job as a miner. Fancy schooling and social graces were not much of an advantage in a dark shaft underground.

The year 1930 saw a change in the administration of the ranch. The Tadeviches chose not to renew their lease, so a young couple, Lars and Thelma Kalsta, moved in and made it their home. Thelma's parents owned the ranch across the river from the Browne place. Thelma had worked for Nellie in the house during the summer of 1924; she knew the Browne Ranch well and was happy to make it her home. The Kalstas wished to buy the ranch, but in 1930 Joseph and Nellie set the price at \$32,000. While that would have been a high price a decade earlier, in the depression years it was a preposterous one. The Kalstas leased the ranch for one year and then later purchased Thelma's parents' ranch across the river.<sup>77</sup> She lives there today.

The following year the family of John and Josephine Verbance, immigrants from Croatia, picked up the lease. They kept it for ten years, and finally formed a partnership consisting of John and Josephine, their son, John, and their daughter, Caroline, and her husband, Mack Poole. They bought the ranch from Nellie in 1941 for \$10,000.<sup>78</sup>

It may be logical to assume that with limited expenses, a curtailed lifestyle, the lease income, and a steady paycheck the Browne's chronic shortage of cash and lack of financial acumen would be ameliorated. This was not the case. Joseph and Nellie retained their precarious financial position, teetering on the edge of insolvency for the rest of their lives. This condition can not be attributed to a lack of income, however, for in addition to Joseph's wages and the income from the ranch rents, other monies were constantly made available.

Mary Dullea died in 1933. Her will not only forgave the \$8,000 mortgage Joseph and Nellie had taken out in 1922, it also left Nellie an inheritance of \$7318 in her own name and control of Clarence's share of \$4,194. Eleven months prior to Mary's death on November 11, 1933, Clarence was committed to the Montana State Hospital at Warm Springs. He was never paroled. At the time of Mary's death, the Brownes were over \$1,000 behind in their interest payments on the mortgage. Although that amount was deducted from Nellie's final settlement, she still inherited over \$6,000.<sup>79</sup> Mary's will was settled in 1936, but the Brownes could not wait for Nellie's share. In July of 1935 they used the ranch as collateral and borrowed \$3,500 from Clarence's estate. The promissory note was due two years later with interest accruing at 5%.<sup>80</sup> They never repaid the loan. The mortgage and entailment of the ranch was not revealed to the

Verbances in 1941. Years later, after the deaths of both John Verbance and Clarence Dullea, Caroline Poole, as administrator of her father's estate, was left a snarl of legal procedures she had to untangle in order to remove the lien that had been placed on the ranch.<sup>81</sup>

Mining and life in Butte did not prove to be suited to Joseph's rather fragile temperament. As the years passed, he grew more and more agitated. In September of 1935 he was recommitted to the state hospital. He was again paroled after three months, but his improvement did not last. He returned to Warm Springs in March 1936, and there he lived the fourteen remaining years of his life. Joseph died May 6, 1950, and was buried in the Silver Star Cemetery, just outside the Dullea family plot.<sup>82</sup>

Nellie remained in Butte after Joseph's final commitment. Her location was convenient to make her frequent visits to both her brother and husband. She moved twice more; shortly after Joseph left she moved to the second floor of a narrow house on Idaho Street. It was located in a safe neighborhood, close to the downtown area. A few years later she relocated to a one-room apartment in the Pennsylvania building above the Woolworth's store.<sup>83</sup> There she lived out the remainder of her life.

Nellie's final ten years were not what her popular and pretty friends in Silver Star and Twin Bridges would have predicted for her. She started drinking and gambling. In

1945 she had to apply for public welfare assistance which she received for the rest of her life. Nellie died at age 78 on October 25, 1958, of heart disease brought on by arteriosclerosis. She was buried beside Joseph in Silver Star. Her estate consisted of some clothes and personal effects and a half-interest in the Faithful Lode mining claim in Vipond. The mine interest was sold to pay back taxes.<sup>84</sup> Of the excellent financial, educational, and social background to which both she and Joseph had been privy, nothing remained.

\* \* \*

The Browne Ranch stayed in the Poole family and is currently owned and run by Mack Poole and his offspring. It still looks much as it did when Nellie and Joseph lived there. The barn and outbuildings still stand, and from the front yard one gets a spectacular view of the valley, the fields, the rolling hills, and a meandering trail of trees from which one is occasionally blinded by the glinting sunlight as it bounces off the river. Nellie saw these same sights when she arrived at the Browne Ranch, newly married, in 1904. At that time, she must have been filled with a sense of purpose, with a knowledge of her own capabilities, and with a deep belief in her ability to succeed.

ENDNOTES

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3. Probate 1616 (Madison County Courthouse).
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5. *Madison Monitor*, 2 January 1903, 24 April 1903, 29 May 1908.
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7. Probate 1411 (Madison County Courthouse).
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10. Charles Stauffer, ed., *History of Beaverhead County: Montana Vol. I, 1800-1920* (Dillon, Montana: Beaverhead County History Book Asso., 1990), 123-4.
11. Letter from Agnes Browne to Fannie Browne in possession of Margaret Hagenbarth of Dillon, Montana.
12. Ibid.
13. *All Hallow's College Yearbook, 1902-1903*, Archives, Diocese of Salt Lake City, 46.
14. Bradley Collection, newspaper clipping in scrapbook; letter from Agnes Browne to Fannie Browne.
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18. *Dillon Tribune*, 24 August 1906.
19. *Progressive Men of Montana*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: A. W. Boaler & Co., 1902), 609; James U. Sanders, ed., *Society of Montana Pioneers*, Vol. I (Akron, Ohio: Werner Co. Printers and Binders, 1899), 226.  
Note: Joseph Sr. served as a representative at the Territorial Assembly during both 1869 and 1872. In 1881 he was elected to serve on the Montana Council and in 1884 was a member of the Territorial Convention. In the company of Hon. J.K. Toole and W.A. Clark he carried its proceedings to Washington D.C. He ran for Secretary of State in 1889 and was defeated, as were all other Democrats running for state offices that year with the exception of Governor Joseph K. Toole.
20. *Madison Monitor*, 25 July 1902, 26 December 1902, 2 January 1903, 6 February 1903, 20 March 1903, 21 April 1899.
21. *Madison Monitor*, 6 February 1903; *Dillon Examiner*, 18 May 1904; *Virginia City Madisonian*, 19 May 1904.
22. "Article of Incorporation", Miscellaneous file 43, 5405 (Beaverhead County Courthouse).
23. *Miscellaneous Records*, 98:144; *Deeds*, 100:384 (Madison County Courthouse).
24. *Deeds*, 100:385; Probate 541 (Madison County Courthouse).
25. Probate 541; *Deeds*, 100:387, 389 (Madison County Courthouse).
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29. Mack Poole of Glen, Montana, interview by author, 11 July 1992, tape recording in possession of author; *Deeds*, 75:375 (Beaverhead County Courthouse); Bradley Collection, bank records.
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31. Bradley Collection, bank records.
32. Malone and Etulain, *The American West*, 18.
33. Nicholas, 71-4.
34. Thelma Kalsta of Glen, Montana, interview by author, 11 July 1992, 31 July 1992, tape recordings in possession of author; Adelaide Gelhaus, interview by author, 31 July 1992, Mack Poole, July 11, 1992.
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37. Ibid.
38. Bradley Collection, bank records.
39. Mack Poole of Glen, Montana, interview by author, 11 July 1992, tape recording in possession of author; *History of Beaverhead County*, 123-4.
40. Bradley Collection, bank records and contract agreement.
41. *Mortgages*, 107:55 (Madison County Courthouse); Bradley Collection, bank records.
42. *Index to Deeds, grantor*, 2 (Beaverhead County Courthouse); Bradley Collection, receipts and letter from H. L. McCaleb, 26 November 1921.
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44. Bradley Collection, letter from H. L. McCaleb, 26 November 1921.
45. Bradley Collection, letters and photographs.
46. Bradley Collection, bank records.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Bradley Collection, bank records,; *Dillon Examiner*, 17 April 1916.
50. Bradley Collection, bank records, letters.
51. Bradley Collection, letter from H. L. McCaleb, 9 September 1920.
52. Bradley Collection, letter from McKown and Crook, 10 May 1921.
53. Bradley Collection, letter from Frank J. Hagenbarth, 24 June 1921.
54. Bradley Collection, bank records. *Note: Nellie wrote almost all checks for the months of July, August, and September, 1921.*
55. Bradley Collection, bank records; *Official Gazette of U.S. Patent Office*, 295:1, 76.
56. Bradley Collection, letter from H. L. McCaleb, 26 November 1921.
57. Bradley Collection, letter from John Collins, 12 December 1921.
58. Bradley Collection, undated bill of sale, cash receipt, 15 June 1922, Union Pacific freight bill.
59. *Mortgages*, 107:55; probate 1223 (Madison County Courthouse).
60. Bradley Collection, bank records.
61. Bradley Collection, 1923 Income Tax form.
62. Interview with Thelma Kalsta.
63. Bradley Collection, bank records.



64. Bradley Collection, 1922 Montana Motor Registration Certificate, bank records; interview with Thelma Kalsta.
65. Bradley Collection, statement from Mutual Life Insurance Co., 5 December 1924, account records; interviews with Thelma Kalsta and Mack Poole.
66. Interview with Mack Poole.
67. Bradley Collection, report by Equitable Health Conservation Service, 23 June 1924, 17 December 1924.
68. Bradley Collection, letters and telegrams from Katherine Dullea, bank records, 1923.
69. *Official Gazette of U.S. Patent Office.*
70. Bradley Collection, bank records, letters from patent attorneys and manufacturing companies.
71. *Insanity Index*, 170, (Beaverhead County Courthouse); Warm Springs Hospital admissions records.
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73. Probate, 2:455, #949, (Beaverhead County Courthouse); Bradley Collection, letters from John Collins, 24 February 1928, 3 March 1928, order discharging guardian, #915.
74. Bradley Collection, letter from John Collins, 24 April 1928; interviews with Mack Poole and Thelma Kalsta.
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76. *Polk's Butte City Directory*, 1930, 1931, 1934, 1939; Bradley Collection, bank records.
77. Interview with Thelma Kalsta.
78. Interview with Mack Poole; *Deeds*, 125:397-8 (Beaverhead County Courthouse).
79. Probate 1223 (Madison County Courthouse).
80. Probate 611 (Madison County Courthouse).

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82. Warm Springs Hospital admissions records; death certificate 14432 (Deerlodge County Courthouse).
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## CHAPTER II

### VALUES

Few forces have the power of an internalized value system. It provides the basis for appropriate expression of the individual personality by molding responses to and expectations from life experiences. Our value system creates the paradigm for acceptable and inappropriate behaviors and acts as a powerful filter through which we pass judgements on the conduct of ourselves and others. Nellie Browne's value system, created from the culture and institutions within her environment, determined her actions and reactions and established her own set of personal standards. Input from her parents, the Catholic Church, and her community combined to form within her a cohesive and distinct code for living.

The values central to Nellie's system of thought and behavior appear to cluster around the areas of religion, marriage, family, and friendships. She had an internal structure focused on these areas that determined suitable and unsuitable behaviors which in turn formed and influenced her feelings within each thematic area. Because such profound changes eventually took place within her marriage and family, it will be important to note the circumstances

surrounding each modification in values. But this chapter and the next will discuss the expression of Nellie's values up to the points at which change was initiated, roughly beginning in 1927.

## I

Nellie was guided by the depth and extent of her religious training. Her association with the Catholic Church reached back through generations of Irish forbearers. It was further solidified by her marriage to Joseph who brought to their union an equally strong Catholic heritage.<sup>1</sup> The evidences for the strength of Nellie's ties to the church are many and persuasive, and include what many consider the ultimate commitments of time and money.

Contributing to the church was a responsibility which Nellie accepted and to which she adhered all her life. She began writing checks to the various Catholic fathers in 1917, and her continuous donations indicate a pattern that must have existed throughout her adult life.<sup>2</sup> She undoubtedly gave cash when she did not write checks. Joseph apparently agreed with the expectation that they would financially support the church, but he was willing to pass to Nellie the actual responsibility for writing the checks; from 1917 to 1932 he wrote only three of the total 30 checks. From the evidence of their 1923 income taxes and checks, Nellie donated money directly to the pastor who

served as her spiritual guide. She gave far less than a tithe; the actual amount in 1923 was closer to 7% of net income, and checks from other years suggest that usually 2-3% was typical.<sup>3</sup> Still, she cannot be classified as a casual giver, for casual givers do not usually use checks or keep donation records for tax purposes. Nellie knew she was expected to support her church and did so with regularity and continuity.

She also showed her willingness to support her church through active participation in St. John's Guild, the women's auxiliary. In 1924 the community decided to build a church and manse. Nellie assumed responsibility for selling tickets for the fund raising dance, served as guild treasurer, and donated a new carpet as well. Additionally, she served as the purchaser for the manse furnishings.<sup>4</sup>

The Brownes maintained a close friendship with Father Clifford, the young pastor who arrived to serve their parish in 1918. His letters to them both, written while Joseph was hospitalized in Warm Springs in 1927, reveal the intimacy of their relationship. In these letters he referred to the pet names Nellie and Joseph had for each other and visits he had made to Nellie during Joseph's commitment. He knew not only the other members of her family, but also the squabbles and difficulties they endured. They shared jokes, including slightly naughty ones, and she fed and housed him when he came to Melrose to serve his parishioners.<sup>5</sup> Nellie had

undoubtedly been raised to foster and appreciate a familiar relationship with her spiritual minister.

The artifacts of Catholicism in the Browne's house provide tangible evidence of the significance Nellie placed on her ties to the church. Among her possessions were a large Catholic Bible, a jeweled cross brooch, a silver baptismal bowl, an ebony and brass crucifix, and a photograph of Pope Leo X mounted on a document dated April 4, 1906 that granted her apostolic benediction and plenary indulgence.<sup>6</sup> Framed and displayed behind glass, it would have been one of her prized possessions, most likely presented as a gift by her priest for her demonstrated faith and service to Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The final and most commanding indicators of Nellie's feelings concerning the place of religion in her life are two artistic declarations of faith. Neither is signed, but authentication of her as the artist of the first can be provided through the current owners, and the other can be traced to her through handwriting samples.<sup>8</sup>

The first is a watercolor painting of the sacred heart, vividly portrayed with flaming droplets of blood and encircled with thorns. The heart is positioned on the upper half of the painting; the lower half is filled with a profusion of delicately shaded flowers--purple, pink, lavender, red, and white carnations and sweet peas. Leaves tinted from a range of greens to grays accent the flowers

and all is placed on a background ranging from orange to blue-grey.<sup>9</sup> The total effect of the artwork is dramatic. One feels the deep personal bond between the artist and God, and also a deep agony. This is an emotion-filled painting that captures the beauty, peace, and ecstasy of an intimate spiritual relationship and also concedes the wrenching pain such an interface carries with it.

The second item is a prayer Nellie wrote, an impassioned plea for intercession.

"Oh! Sacred Heart of Jesus I have asked you for many favors but I plead for this one.---Take it, place it in your open broken bleeding heart and when the Eternal Faith sees it covered with the mantle of his most precious Blood he will not refuse it...Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus I plead with my trust in thee. Our Lady, Our Queen, Our Mother, in the name of Jesus and for the love of Jesus I ask you to take this cause in your hands and give it good success. Amen."<sup>10</sup>

Unsigned, undated, heartfelt, and humble; it is easy to imagine Nellie, eyes wet, emotions raw, pouring every ounce of her faith into this ardent supplication. A cataclysmic event must have been the cause of such a fervent exclamation of faith, such an imploring entreaty. It is my belief that these two items were created in 1927 and are the last visible remnants of Nellie's religious values before momentous change caused her to adjust those values. They poise on an escarpment, created out of youthful values in response to overwhelming events, yet before she had time to remold her outlook.

Nellie acknowledged her dependence upon God and the religious rituals of her youth in the fashioning of these sacred tokens. She owed the church and God her support, financial and physical, her faith, and her obedience. In return, she would be provided with emotional support, love, and hopefully, answers to her prayers.

## II

Nellie married Joseph during an era of transition. In 1904 the Victorian Age with its belief in the "Cult of True Womanhood" and its accompanying virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness was being supplanted by the Progressive Era and its conferred freedoms and equalities for women.<sup>11</sup> The issue needing examination is whether Nellie adhered to the traditional views of the Victorian wife or adopted the freer attitudes of the New Woman.

National indications of role change among women were found in the loosening of dress codes and behavioral morals. The elimination of corsets, numerous undergarments, and yards in skirts went hand in hand with the elimination of behavioral restrictions. It was becoming fashionable for married women of the upper classes to smoke and drink in public. New employment opportunities, the automobile, and labor-saving devices worked to lift the constraints imposed by the ever-present mountain of housework.<sup>12</sup>



Where did Nellie fit into this transitional age? Did she take advantage of the new methods and materials, and bring to her marriage the modern attitude of a self-directed woman, or did lifestyle and/or upbringing impose a wifely role grounded on Victorian virtues?

James R. McGovern in his scrutiny of American women's Pre-World War I independence claims that the "cardinal condition of change was not sophistication but urban living and the freedom it conferred."<sup>13</sup> His conclusions concerning the connections between female emancipation and city dwelling are affirmed in an examination of Nellie's lifestyle. Electricity did not arrive in Melrose until 1938.<sup>14</sup> That fact alone automatically eliminated the availability of most labor-saving devices. She had to go out to the yard to pump water, and to the ice house for perishables. She cooked on a woodstove, used a broom, carpet sweep, and a rug beater, and sewed on a treadle machine. Doing laundry was an all-day chore.<sup>15</sup> Her lack of options enforced an attitude of domesticity just as her religious beliefs required a demeanor of piety and purity.

On the other hand, one doubts that, on the ranch, the confining ethos of the Victorian era had ever prevailed, and as for submission, it is doubtful that Nellie was devoted to this "virtue". During interviews with those who knew her and Joseph, I attempted to ascertain which of them was the driving force within the marriage; who was in charge; who

had the voice of final authority. The responses were mixed, but all agreed that Nellie had a strong sense of her own identity and knew how to operate within her role as the virtuous wife to achieve her own ends. She was an assertive, take-charge person who knew how to work within the prevailing system, which for her was definitely not one of submission.<sup>16</sup>

Several episodes from the marriage validate this claim. Joseph had a sweet tooth. He craved candy, so Nellie saw to it that he "always had all the homemade candy he could have."<sup>17</sup> This behavior could be viewed as a sign of her acceptance of a submissive role within the marriage, a willingness to devote herself to pleasing her husband. More likely, it was an awareness that such a small task was worth the effort as it gave a loved one great pleasure.

Joseph also liked to see the papers and mail each day. Although there is no indication of her driving elsewhere, Nellie drove the car to Melrose on a daily basis, right after she washed the mid-day meal dishes, to pick up the papers and mail and to do the grocery shopping.<sup>18</sup> The 16 mile trip must have consumed the better part of an hour of each busy day, yet she was willing to expend this time as it pleased Joseph. It also got her out of the house and provided a chance for socialization.

During the summer of 1924, the Brownes provided room and board for 10 hired men. Nellie and her hired girl,

Thelma Hand, cooked and washed for the men. Joseph had become what Thelma described as "a little problem" and under the circumstances it would be expected that a wife jump to attendance when a difficult husband entered the room. Yet, Nellie went about her business when Joseph came in for his meals. She had affairs to see to and expected no interference from him. She also successfully elicited his help on wash days when tubs of water had to be lifted and carried from one location to another. She was a big woman, probably just as capable as Joseph at strenuous tasks, but she managed to convince him that his assistance was essential, perhaps to assure him of the necessity of his playing the male role.<sup>19</sup>

When Nellie and Joseph took vacations at Browne's Lake, she expected to have time to recreate just as he did. She spent her days fishing on the lake after coercing the daughters of friends to row her about. In much the same way, when Joseph motored to Dillon to conduct business with his legal firm, Norris, Hurd, and Collins, Nellie accompanied him and used the time to renew old friendships. Nellie and Joseph stayed with their close friends, the Gelhauses. These visits were treasured moments of fun and sharing. The adults discussed political issues and it was quite apparent that Nellie had an opinion of her own and would not necessarily defer to her husband's.<sup>20</sup>

On these trips Nellie took advantage of the opportunity

to shop. Adelaide Gelhaus remembers, "She would always get someone to drive her. Joe would drive her. Still, she was very independent."<sup>21</sup>

Nellie demonstrated a flexibility within her marriage relationship. While Joseph worked at ranching, she filled the role of rancher's wife. After they moved to Portland, she quickly slipped into the more social role as wife of an urban entrepreneur. When the economic conditions in Montana demanded their return, she adjusted once again to her role as cook and laundress on the ranch.<sup>22</sup> She provided Joseph with unconditional support through all his various attempts at making a living and was willing to take out loans from her mother and against her brother's estate to finance his efforts.<sup>23</sup> This was a societal expectation. As one woman put it, "You know, ladies in the home, they backed their husbands....They stood behind their man, that's what you want to say."<sup>24</sup> So, while Victorian expectations, if they had ever fully applied in reality, certainly did not confine Nellie to an attitude of submission within the looser conventions of separate but nearly equal gender roles, she conceded the essential of male leadership. Yet, another source reverses this relationship: Adelaide Gelhaus noted that although Nellie was the director of family actions and proceedings, Joseph was never "henpecked".<sup>25</sup> It is possible that Nellie used her power so wisely and carefully, none but those closest to her recognized her ultimate authority.

As a couple, Nellie and Joseph were somewhat different from most ranch families. Because they had no children, the hours they did not spend caring for young ones could be devoted to each other. Joseph was a pleasant man. Ms. Gelhaus describes him as one who spoke well and had a delightful sense of humor. While out on a hike one day he discovered a new lake and named it Lake Helen for his wife. One can easily conclude from letters and interviews that he and Nellie shared a deep love.<sup>26</sup> Father Clifford recognized it, as did the friends they made in Portland. Children of friends of the Brownes commented on it. Adelaide Gelhaus, even as a young girl, saw it and later remarked, "They seemed to enjoy each other."<sup>27</sup> This is notable during an age when other rural couples bonded out of mutual need to survive rather than out of feelings of love. "There were darn few marriages of love out here among these early beginners....I don't think I've ever heard a homestead wife tell how much she loved her husband. That wasn't part of it, it was survival," one woman from Cutbank, Montana, flatly stated.<sup>28</sup> After their return from Portland, Nellie, sensing Joseph's regret over leaving the city, redecorated their parlor, modernizing it into a room more fitted to their life in Portland than that of the ranch. She told Thelma Hand, the young girl working for her, that she did it for Joe, to make him feel better about having to return.<sup>29</sup>

Nellie's notion of her role as a good wife was

apparently based upon mutual love and trust, for she maintained her role as a somewhat unsubmitive but otherwise conventionally virtuous and certainly loving wife until Joseph behaved contrarily to their pact of love and trust. This occurred in 1927 and was cause for his first commitment into the state mental hospital.<sup>30</sup> After this betrayal, Nellie had to adjust her own value system concerning marriage. She did this in ways that will be addressed in succeeding chapters.

The outward expression of Nellie's values concerning the institution of marriage fit within the conceptual framework of nineteenth-century Victorian ideals. The strength of her personality resulted in an unwillingness to mentally submit to male authority, but this did not strain her relationship with Joseph because he apparently accepted her strength as an integral part of her. Nellie brought a sense of fun into her husband's life. His own well-developed sense of humor no doubt appreciated her independent and unsubmitive nature.<sup>31</sup> One has to wonder why she chose Joseph. Was it because she recognized the qualities in his personality that would permit her to maintain her independence? Was he the only Catholic man around with good looks, charm and finesse? Or, perhaps theirs was a marriage for love and she believed she could manage his weaknesses. At any rate, she tempered her independence with concessions sufficient enough to allow him

to retain a public image of lord and master within his marriage.

### III

As in her marital relationship with Joseph, Nellie held specific ideas concerning the bonds of her family of origin. When the rules were upheld, her role was as a loving, devoted, dutiful daughter and a generous, supportive, congenial sister. Her role was maintained as long as her self-imposed definitions of relationship remained in place. It is clear from various forms of evidence that the other members of her immediate family adhered to these same rules: close ties were maintained until an action of betrayal eliminated the obligation of strong family loyalty. As will be seen, while she would endure any hardship and remain bonded to her husband--albeit even there on changing terms--this was in the end not always true of her family. But there is an additional feature. She and her siblings grew up well off, at the center of attention within a protected local milieu. Like her husband, two of her siblings were to crumble under the pressure of the real world. In all three cases she was to take on the role of survivor and manager. One cannot but wonder if she had not already begun to play this role in childhood.

Several incidents support this interpretation of Nellie's familial values. They include not only her

interactions with her brothers, sister, and parents, but her siblings' interactions with their parents as well. From such an examination, we gain a better understanding of the values within her larger blood-family unit.

The Dullea children were reared with the expectation that they would provide service and support to one another, to their parents, and also to society. In 1915, shortly after John Sr.'s death, the Dullea siblings met to discuss Clarence. It was decided that he would need a legal guardian, and the one best suited to do the job was Nellie.<sup>32</sup> At first glance she seems an unusual choice; however, after consideration of her bubbly personality, her deeply internalized commitment to family, and the solidity of her marriage to Joseph, the decision appears logical and sound. Katherine, John, and their mother must have believed her managerial skills also included financial acumen.

Nellie's conduct in her role as Clarence's guardian illustrates her beliefs in family support. She willingly remained dedicated to meeting Clarence's needs for the rest of his life, even after he was committed to the Montana State Hospital. The contingent quality to the links with her remaining siblings reveals the darker side to the Dullea family relationships.

In 1899, Nellie's older sister Katherine returned from St. Mary's academy. She moved to Twin Bridges where she worked with her father, and for the next three years



alternated her residence between Silver Star and Twin Bridges. Social life dictated that much of her time be spent in Twin Bridges, the much larger community, but as her mother remained in the family home in Silver Star, familial contact and responsibilities required frequent trips home. After the spring of 1902 Nellie did the same.<sup>33</sup> This would suggest that not only did John and Mary Dullea expect their daughters to help out in the business, they also allowed them considerable freedom and independence. It is true that the sisters, both past the age of 20, were young adults, but considering the nine mile distance between Silver Star and Twin Bridges and the remnants of a Victorian attitude which required women to be escorted, protected, and chaperoned, the Dulleas showed a remarkably progressive spirit. They allowed Katherine and Nellie to live in Twin Bridges without a female chaperon and condoned the frequent travel necessary to get them from there to the other communities nearby.<sup>34</sup> The two women most likely traveled by train or public stage, yet their frequent journeys suggest a self-confidence and self-sufficiency within their family that must have also been visible to the public world.

Nellie and her older sister were apparently quite close. The local press frequently noted their activities, and these were often accomplished jointly. On one occasion they held a card party in honor of Alice Mahoney and Frances Browne, the sisters of their future husbands. The

orchestration of the party was no small undertaking as their guest list included sixty names. The affair was pronounced the event of the season, a great success.<sup>35</sup> Instead of competing, the sisters worked as a team, when throwing a party, when doing charity work, or when arranging opportunities for social encounters with beaus.

A deeper look at Katherine's personality is warranted, as she set a standard so high, Nellie could have easily been daunted at the idea of attempting to follow in such an imposing set of footsteps. Katherine was a gifted musician. Intelligent, pretty and popular as well as talented, Katherine's name was often touted within the community. She played in the town orchestra and often volunteered her celebrated ability as both violinist and pianist to accompany others. She was the first to move to Twin Bridges to work with her father. Once there, she founded a dramatics club and served as an active participant in their community theater. After her marriage to John J. Mahoney and her move to Virginia City, she continued to involve herself in community affairs, joining clubs, women's groups, and local theatrical productions. Rave reviews always resulted from her efforts.<sup>36</sup> Katherine presented a tough act to follow.

The available evidence does not even hint at a rivalry between Katherine and Nellie. While they frequently entertained jointly, each just as often took on projects

that did not include the other.<sup>37</sup> After both were married and Katherine had a family, they shared extensively in each other's lives. Nellie spent weeks in Portland, and Katherine apparently brought her children to the ranch for many relaxing summer vacations.<sup>38</sup> This relationship of unity, mutuality, and delight in each other's company was so close that the eventual fracture of the bond must have been absolutely devastating to both of them.

It was after Nellie and Joseph moved to Portland that Katherine ran into trouble. A woman doctor in the late 1910s who juggled her life to balance career, children, marriage, and social life must have suffered tremendous censure and stress. On November 5, 1919 she entered Portland's Mountain View Sanitarium. Nellie and Joseph picked up the \$260 tab and paid for the additional doctor bills. The Dullea siblings, minus Clarence, were all in Portland at the time, brother John visiting his sisters.<sup>39</sup> After her rest, all apparently went well for Katherine until 1922. She visited her family late in the year and it was clear to all that she was chemically addicted. Her mother, amazed at her elder daughter's ability to deny her problem, wrote to Nellie and described what would now be categorized as a typical dysfunctional family attempting to cope with an addict. Katherine's marriage undoubtedly suffered from the effects of her disease, and brothers John and Clarence were quite vocal in their support for their brother-in-law, which

resulted in acrimonious family fights. Mary tried to keep drugs out of Katherine's hands, but Katherine had become an expert sneak. She returned to Portland in mid-January of 1923 after keeping the stage to Butte waiting so she could run upstairs for just one more dose.<sup>40</sup> She was oblivious to the pain and disruption she had inflicted upon her family.

Just two weeks later, on February 3, she sent a telegram to Nellie in Melrose. It contained a panic-stricken plea for help. Katherine's disease had jeopardized her marriage to the extent that divorce was imminent. She wanted Nellie to come to Portland immediately. Katherine apparently realized that her behavior during her visit home had damaged her ability to gain sympathy from her family, for she begged Nellie not tell John of her plans and admitted that she had not informed their mother of the current situation.<sup>41</sup> She believed that the emotional ties between Nellie and herself would cause her younger sister to lend her support and backing. But, Nellie was seemingly beginning to understand that sympathy was not in her sister's best interest. She kept apprised of the situation through Margaret Smith, a family friend who lived in Portland, but she remained in Melrose.

A month later, on March 5, Margaret Smith telegraphed Nellie: Divorce was postponed, but Nellie was needed to assist in getting Katherine to a sanitarium.<sup>42</sup> Nellie and Joseph left for Portland the following day and later that

month registered Katherine at the Hamilton Narcotic Institute. They paid the entire \$350 charge for her treatment.<sup>43</sup>

John Mahoney took their four children and moved to Los Angeles. He put their two daughters in the care of nuns at the Holy Names Convent in Pamona, California. Their sons he kept with himself, but he informed Katherine that when she came to visit she would not be allowed to take the children from the premise. In anger and self pity, Katherine wrote her mother, "It is awful to think of the outrages I have to stand and that the actions of John, Joe and Nell have made it possible for them to treat me thus."<sup>44</sup> She clearly believed that the blame for her life's upheaval lay at the feet of her sister, brother-in-law, brother, and husband.

Katherine and Nellie were both strong women, and it was evidently impossible for either to understand the other's point of view or to imagine that her actions were distressing to the other. Katherine later became rehabilitated and continued her practice, but she never did reconcile with her sister.<sup>45</sup> She and Nellie each believed the other guilty of perfidious behavior and each saw the rules governing family relationships as having been ignored by her sibling. For Nellie's part, the alienation from her elder sister was something she could live with. She had had enough.

Nellie's brother, John, echoed by his actions a code of

behavior similar to his sisters. He, Nellie, and Katherine participated in many social activities together as young adults. After Nellie and Katherine were married he visited them both, thus indicating a relationship mutually enjoyed by all three siblings.<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after his father's death, John willingly agreed to be excluded from his mother's will, which meant forfeiting his share of his father's estate. Possibly he recognized the increased opportunities open to him as a male, or perhaps he had already successfully established himself in business. In 1917 he purchased from his mother and siblings one of his father's lots and paid them \$4,200 for it.<sup>47</sup> The visits to Nellie and Katherine and the fact that he remained at home and continued to watch over the family interests suggest that he maintained an amiable relationship with his family.

Yet, during the course of the next twenty-three years he emotionally separated himself from them. He became angry over the acerbic family quarrels concerning Katherine's addiction and then sided with her in her later battles with Nellie. Finally, he renounced them all at the time of his death. He stipulated in his will that because he had already helped all three of them considerably during his lifetime, each sibling was to receive one dollar only from his estate. John never married, so in the absence of heirs, he willed the rest of his considerable holdings to three



5. Social group from Twin Bridges. From left: Nellie, Joseph, unknown, John Dullea, Katherine, John Mahoney. Used with permission of Margaret Hagenbarth.

unrelated individuals. He also requested that his body not be returned to the family plot in Silver Star, but that burial take place in Portland, where he died. His request was not honored.<sup>48</sup>

It is quite possible that John remained close to his sisters until Katherine became an addict and until Nellie, at the end, began drinking and gambling in Butte. Their brother Clarence may have lost his brother's support when his behavior caused his commitment to the Montana State Hospital in 1933. John knew he had family responsibilities, but once the strictures for family behavior had been violated by his siblings, he presumably considered his obligations to be null and void.

Nellie's relationship with her mother is partially revealed through Mary's letters. Since Nellie's replies cannot be found, we must extrapolate those from Mary's comments. We can also learn much from the legal agreements between Mary and Nellie. The two women shared a close bond, yet each knew how to maintain a formal attitude towards the business arrangements made within the family.

Thus, one of Nellie's first actions as Clarence's guardian, in 1915, was to put Clarence's land holdings on the market. They were purchased by his mother for \$2,000. The offer was made by Mary in a formal letter to Nellie in which she addressed her as "Dear Daughter, Helen J. Browne" and signed it "Your mother, Mary E. Dullea".<sup>49</sup> The language



of the letter is business-like, almost terse. No family news or chit chat is included. Mary kept her business affairs separate from family feeling. Other than that sale, Mary continued to care for Clarence until 1933 when she suffered from circulatory problems and eventual gangrene. At that time, Nellie put Clarence into the Montana State Mental Hospital and used his inheritance to pay for his care.<sup>50</sup>

Mary used the interest payments from Joseph and Nellie's mortgage as part of her livelihood. While she remained close to her daughter, she did not hesitate to tell her to send money when it was due. In a letter written in November 1923 she asked for \$100 to help with taxes and the cost of winter wood. She also reminded her daughter about her annual interest payment, cautioning her to pay it prior to the onset of the new year.<sup>51</sup>

She was frank and open with Nellie concerning her other children. Her letters to Nellie during Katherine's difficulties display a confiding air as she showed no hesitation in relating John's anger, Clarence's confusion, and Katherine's perfidy.<sup>52</sup> It is probable that she and Nellie enjoyed a closeness that Mary may not have shared with her other children.

The relationship Mary had with her son-in-law must have been cordial, for her letters indicate that it was common for Joseph to stop by to visit his mother-in-law and that

she looked forward to these brief calls with pleasure.<sup>53</sup>

Nellie, while always revealing an independent spirit and lifestyle, shared with her mother a mutual concern and willingness to be inconvenienced for the sake of the other.

Nellie's attitude towards members of her family was that of loyalty and closeness. She willingly served as Clarence's guardian; she rushed to rescue Katherine from herself in Portland; her brother was a welcome guest in her home; she abided by her mother's wishes and kept in close and frequent contact with her. The relationships with her various family members were costly in terms of money and time expended and when these bonds were reciprocated she was willing to make the required sacrifices. However, when those relationships were abused, she severed them from her life with no outward signs of regret, sorrow, or remorse.

#### IV

According to Glenda Riley in her comparative study of women on the prairie and plains, female friendships served to sustain western women who had to cope with hard labor, isolation, and loneliness.<sup>54</sup> While Nellie was raised in a town and did not have to endure a lonely and strenuous lifestyle to the extent that women from her mother's generation did, at an early age she learned the value of companionship. The ties binding Nellie to friends made throughout her lifetime were strong and long-lasting. All

evidence indicates that her friendships were easily made and extraordinarily maintained. As in her relationships with family members, Nellie directly benefitted from and contributed to the associations with her friends. She obviously enjoyed her friends and they reciprocated.

The earliest indications we find concerning Nellie's attitudes towards friends come from the society columns in the newspapers of both Twin Bridges and Virginia City. Her name first appears in 1899 when she was 19 years of age. For the next four years her activities were frequently noted by both papers. Usually she was mentioned in concert with a variety of local friends. Furthermore, her visits to Anaconda, Melrose, Virginia City, and Butte indicate that her friendships were not limited to Silver Star and Twin Bridges. She seemed to make friends wherever she went. In one paper's account Nellie was stated to be "one of Madison County's fairest and most popular young ladies" who had a "host of friends". Another claimed she was "universally admired and esteemed". Still another stated that she was "one of Montana's fair flowers, whose friends are legion".<sup>55</sup> Even after taking into consideration the ornate language of most newspapers' social columns of the time, the accolades Nellie received for her popularity and sheer number of friends was of considerably greater extent than that of other young women.

We should note, however, that the form of these early

relationships more closely resembles self-gratifying popularity rather than true friendship, for after her marriage only a few of Nellie's many childhood friends came to visit or were visited in return.<sup>56</sup> Instead, she seems to have matured in the manner in which she viewed relationships. She formed a deep, mutually satisfying relationship with Anna Gelhaus and Rose Stamm, both of Dillon. Anna's daughter, Adelaide, remembers Mrs. Gelhaus, Mrs. Browne, and Miss Stamm, as they all referred to each other, sitting in the Gelhaus front room, laughing and gossiping together. She relates stories of delightful meals spent listening to these women sharing political opinions and grouching about Republicans. The pleasure of the memory is evident in her tales of lazy days spent with the Brownes at the lake. Nellie's friendship with Anna Gelhaus extended to daughter Adelaide as she was later invited to spend a week with Nellie and Joseph in Silver Star and recalls the time with warm satisfaction.<sup>57</sup>

Bonds were also forged with women of Melrose. The Strebs were another family to whom Nellie formed emotional ties. Margaret Streb Gransbery recalls annual visits to Browne's Lake and the close friendship between her mother and Nellie. As in the case with Adelaide, the bond also encompassed the Streb children. Margaret remembers Nellie attending her wedding in the 1940s at a time when health and financial problems must have made such attendance quite

difficult. She remembers spending the ten days prior to the birth of her third son with Nellie in Butte. Nellie eagerly opened her one-room home to the daughter of her old friend, and Margaret recalls Nellie's jokes and breakfasts of toast slathered with whipped cream and cinnamon.<sup>58</sup>

Nellie seemed to have a special gift for providing women a few years younger than herself with a special mentoring friendship, perhaps an extension of that same managing tendency she had in her relationships with siblings and husband. A photograph of a young woman dressed in a frothy white gown was found among Nellie's picture collection. She is holding a diploma and wears a school pin on her breast. The photo is almost identical to Nellie's own graduation portrait. The inscription on the back is "To my dear godmother N.B. from Ethelle".<sup>59</sup> Nellie was 22 when she completed her studies at St. Mary's Academy. Ethelle had to be younger, but the similar hair and dress styles preclude the differences in their ages being great. It is probable that Nellie served as a role model for Ethelle, providing her with friendship and guidance during a school experience that, far from home, could be lonely and frightening.

Although frequently on the giving end in her relationships with others, Nellie was quick to avail to herself the benefits of close friendships. When Joseph's behavior caused his commitment to the asylum in 1927, Nellie

apparently wrote to many of her close friends immediately, for within weeks she received letters of condolence and succor from several points across the nation. The letters all have two things in common: they promise prayers for Joseph's healing and they offer sympathy. It is interesting to note that not one letter condemns Joseph.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps Nellie glossed over the details concerning his commitment, or perhaps her friends knew Joseph to the extent that they recognized that something drastic had occurred to create such dysfunction within the loving husband. In either case, the important fact is Nellie's expectation that her friends would care and help in whatever way they could. This event alone reveals her beliefs and values concerning friendship, although in later years she inadvertently created conditions that resulted in her loss of this support network.

The photographs found in Nellie's papers confirm her companionable nature and attitudes. Several are of her with friends. The studio prints taken in her youth reveal young women appropriately solemn, although they are dressed in modish finery and have their hair arranged in the period's stylish coiffures. Their physical positions are close, almost overlapping, with heads tilted and angled synchronistically. The girls almost look as if they could be sisters.<sup>61</sup> The number and variety of groupings indicate that having a photo session was a fairly common occurrence for Nellie and her friends.

Later shots are more informal and reveal a smiling, or even laughing Nellie. One taken in Portland shows Nellie, Joseph, and two older women in the Browne automobile, Nellie smiling broadly, Joseph perhaps a bit shyly, and the two women in the back less exuberantly than Nellie, but clearly enjoying themselves.<sup>62</sup> Another picture of Nellie was taken at the ranch. Nellie and another woman stand on the porch of the Browne's home. Nellie is laughing, teeth revealed, looking directly into the camera. Her companion is likewise shown with a delighted grin on her face.<sup>63</sup> The women are shoulder to shoulder, perhaps with arms about each other, obviously relishing the company of each other and the opportunity to preserve such closeness on film.

A final indication of Nellie's ability to make and keep friends comes from the comments of those who knew her. Margaret Hagenbarth, Joseph's niece-in-law, met Nellie in 1946, after she moved to her small apartment. This had to have been a depressing time in Nellie's life, yet Margaret remembers her as a lovely lady, one who was lots of fun. Adelaide Gelhaus recalls her as always having a sparkle in her eye, as a woman with wit, outgoing and friendly. Mack Poole had nothing but compliments for Nellie. He clearly thought quite highly of her. Thelma Kalsta stated that she "always thought the world of her (Nellie), even when she went to Butte....She was always friendly". Margaret Streb Gransbery spoke of her with warmth and caring.<sup>64</sup> Nellie was

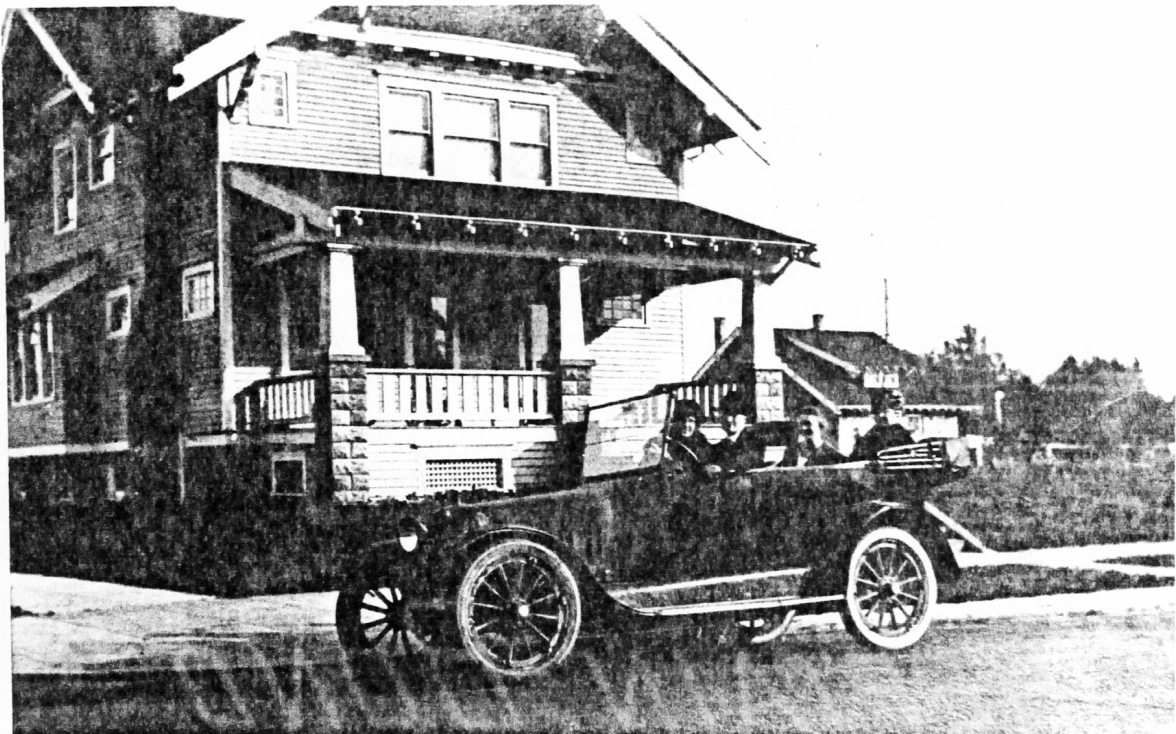


6. Katherine Dullea, undated. Bradley Collection



7. Katherine, Nellie, and two friends. Bradley Collection





8. Nellie and Joseph with friends in Portland. Bradley Collection



9. Nellie with friend at Browne's Ranch. Bradley Collection

obviously beloved by many, perhaps because her feelings and actions towards her friends exemplified her belief in friendship as a relationship based on the shared enjoyment of each other's company and the provision of ready support in time of need.

Although she reached her adulthood at a time when feminism was gaining impetus, and although her best childhood chum, Marie Lott, was the daughter of a local organizer for female suffrage, Nellie was not an ardent activist for women's rights. Her own set of values was molded by a traditionally conservative church and a society that was fairly isolated from the modernizing influence of urbanism. As a child, she was given much freedom, yet carried the responsibility for unquestioning family loyalty, at least up to a point. Her relationship with Joseph allowed her mental and physical freedoms within their marriage to the extent that the conventions of virtue and of separate spheres could be publicly upheld even while Nellie's independence exerted itself within their private world. Nellie's values were formed around teachings from the church: charity, loyalty, love, and devotion. There is also evidence of a predilection for mentoring, for assisting. The boundaries of these life duties extended to the point of reciprocation. Nellie did unto others as they did unto her. She gladly gave of herself as long as such a creed proved sound, and through such giving fit within the

boundaries of Montana's conventions for virtuous women.

ENDNOTES

1. *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: A. W. Boaler & Co., 1902), 609-10; James U. Sanders, ed., *Society of Montana Pioneers*, Vol. 1, (1899), 226; Charles Stauffer, ed., *The History of Beaverhead County, Montana*, Vol I (Dillon, Montana: Beaverhead County History Book Asso., 1990), 123-4.
2. Bradley Collection, bank records and 1923 Income Tax form.
3. Ibid.
4. Bradley Collection, appointment book and bank records.
5. Ibid., letters from Father Timothy Clifford 17 May 1927, 2 April 1927, 8 July 1927, postcard from Castlemarne, Ireland postmarked 1928; Thelma Kalsta, interview.
6. Bradley Collection. The artifacts are in the possession of various Bradley family members. The brooch belongs to Margaret Hagenbarth who received it from Nellie.
7. Father Jim Hogan, Missoula, Montana, interview, 4 August 1992.
8. Bradley Collection (Note: Both Mack Poole and Kathy Bradley claim Nellie as artist of the painting).
9. Bradley Collection.
10. Ibid.
11. James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," in *Our American Sisters*, ed. Jean Friedman & William Shade (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1976), 345-65.
12. Ibid., 357.
13. Ibid.
14. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
15. Ibid.

16. Thelma Kalsta, Adelaide Gelhaus, Margaret Hagenbarth, Mack Poole, interviews.
17. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
18. Ibid. Also see repeated reports in the *Dillon Examiner* of Nellie's shopping trips to Melrose. These first appear in 1915.
19. Ibid.
20. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
21. Ibid.
22. Bradley Collection, letters from Mary Hessian, 24 January 1927, Irene Kampf, 19 January 1927; Adelaide Gelhaus, Thelma Kalsta, interviews.
23. Probate 611; *Index to Mortgages*, 107:55; Probate 1223, 1616, (Madison County Courthouse, Virginia City, Montana).
24. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
25. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
26. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview; Bradley Collection, letters from Father Clifford.
27. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
28. Laurie K. Mercier, "You Had to Make Every Minute Count," *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (Autumn 1988): 52.
29. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
30. Thelma Kalsta, Adelaide Gelhaus, interviews; *Index of Persons Sent to Insane Asylum*, 174, (Beaverhead County Courthouse, Dillon, Montana).
31. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
32. Probate 611 (Madison County Courthouse).
33. *Madison Monitor*, 14 July 1899, 4 July 1902, 29 August 1902.
34. *Madison Monitor*, 5 August 1902, 20 February 1903, 20 June 1902, 3 January 1903.

35. *Madison Monitor*, 25 July 1902.
36. *Madison Monitor*, 2 January 1903, (Note: Katherine is mentioned often during 1899 for her participation in the town orchestra and for accompanying others), 17, 24 April 1903, 29 May 1908; *Virginia City Madisonian*, 6 August 1903, 19 November 1903.
37. *Madison Monitor*, 25 July 1902, 29 August 1902, 9 January 1903, 13, 20, 27 February 1903; *Virginia City Madisonian*, 19, 26 February 1903.
38. Bradley Collection, letter from Kate, 22 April 1927; *Dillon Examiner*, 17 April 1916.
39. Bradley Collection, bank records for November, December, 1919.
40. *Ibid.*, letter from Mary Dullea to Nellie, 14 January 1923.
41. *Ibid.*, telegram from Kate to Nellie, 3 February 1923.
42. *Ibid.*, telegram from Margarite Smith to Nellie, 5 March 1923.
43. *Ibid.*, receipt from Hamilton Narcotic Institute, 27 March 1923, and record keeping list for tax purposes, 4 January 1925-21 December 1927 for attention for K. D. Mahoney. Total amount 585.14.
44. *Ibid.*, letter from Kate to Ma, 9 November 1923.
45. Probate 611 (Madison County Courthouse).
46. *Madison Monitor*, 21 July 1899, 7 November 1906, 7 February 1908.
47. *Deeds*, 93:552, 15445 (Madison County Courthouse).
48. Probate 1411 (Madison County Courthouse).
49. Bradley Collection, letter from Mary Dullea to Helen J. Browne, 4 December 1915.
50. Probate 611 (Madison County Courthouse).
51. Bradley Collection, letter from Mary to Nell & Joe, 12 November 1922.
52. *Ibid.*, also letter from Mary to Nell, 14 January 1923.

53. Ibid.
54. Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 74, 95-6.
55. *Virginia City Madisonian*, 19 May 1904; *Dillon Examiner*, 18 May 1904; *Madison Monitor*, 2 January 1903.
56. *Dillon Examiner*, 10 August 1904; *Dillon Tribune*, 20 April 1906.
57. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
58. Margaret Streb Gransbery, interview.
59. Bradley Collection photographs.
60. Bradley Collection, letters from Virginia Barrett, 11 April 1927; Kate, 22 April 1927; Mary, 22 April 1927; Cassie Laird, 20 April 1927; Fr. Clifford, 2 April 1927, 17 May 1927.
61. Bradley Collection photographs.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Margaret Hagenbarth, Adelaide Gelhaus, Thelma Kalsta, Mack Poole, Margaret Streb Gransbery, interviews, 10-11 July 1992, 31 July 1992, 1 August 1992.



CHAPTER III  
SOCIETAL ROLES AND MATURATION

In the previous chapter we explored how Nellie ordered her values concerning the focal points of her life: family, church, marriage and friends. Values are in large part determined by our perceived roles within society, so before moving on to a discussion on how life changes influenced and modified Nellie's behavior, it seems necessary to take time out to discover just what she thought her role was.

In her suggestion that historians "rethink the significance of the Cult of True Womanhood in the West" Elizabeth Jameson points out that "while some of its ideals were expressed by some western women, the roles it prescribed could be attained only by leisure-class urban women."<sup>1</sup> Jameson's doubts about the total embracement of True Womanhood's ideals are valid, for while the rural western lifestyle prohibited the complete adoption of New Womanhood, it also prohibited a complete fulfillment of the roles of the Victorian Woman. A conflict between the ideals of the Cult and western women is also apparent if we consider the point made by Sandra L. Myres. She postulates that the westward movement was "primarily a middle-class

activity, [that] few of the very poor or the very rich undertook". Not many women from these families formed the urban leisure-class.<sup>2</sup> Nellie's lifestyle prior to her marriage could have loosely categorized her as a member of the western leisure-class. Certainly the curriculum at St. Mary's Academy must have instructed its young women to assume the traditional roles of submissiveness, modesty, and obedience. But after her marriage, life was different. While the Brownes' spending habits may have given the appearance of their inclusion in the leisure-class, the realities of ranch life precluded this. There was just too much work to do. We have already determined that Nellie's espousal of the Cult within the confines of her marriage was partial and, to a certain degree, mandated by a rural lifestyle. But what about Nellie's public image? Did she, after her marriage, fulfill her role as a True Woman by keeping a profile of domesticity and submission? Or is Jameson correct when she challenges the assumption that all westerners believed that women had to adhere to the precepts of the Cult? Or that the stereotype of women as members of genteel womanhood is a distortion of history?<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible, and in fact my proposition, that we are searching for a definitive answer between polarizations that are not applicable to Nellie's situation.

Nellie lived in a time and place so plainly between two extremes she could not possibly be either a distinct member

of the Cult of True Womanhood or a New Woman. Too many oppositions affected her life. She was reared in an up-and-coming modern urban setting as part of the privileged class, yet moved to a ranch with its rural backdrop and accompanying lack of modern amenities. To further distance her from the physical accoutrements of her background, this relocation occurred just at the time all her town friends were beginning to enjoy running water and electricity, conveniences that were years out of her reach. Every time she visited friends in Dillon or Butte and then returned home she was thrust from one world with its attendant expectations to another. Nellie's life was filled with friends and influences from both urban and rural settings. She had feet in both camps, so to speak. "True Woman" or "New Woman" was not the issue; Nellie was a western woman with all its apparent conflicts in terminology. Nellie was herself, and her role was what it had to be to fit within conflicting situations and environments.

## I

Given that Nellie lived on the cusp between "True" and "New Womanhood", the issue is how did she, as a ranch woman of this era, find and define her degree of gender segregation and liberation. Four things leave little doubt as to where Nellie located herself on the spectrum: her place in the public eye early on in her life, her voting

behavior, her position as the leader within her marriage in spite of public concessions to male dominance for Joseph's sake, and her lack of interest in the suffrage movement. Yet, even as we discover where Nellie placed herself, we find that her views of herself may have been misleading.

\* \* \*

In the years prior to her marriage, Nellie was constantly involved in community programs, diversions, and projects. These activities enabled her to enjoy a great deal of freedom, both physical and mental, provided her with constant entertainment, and kept her in the community's limelight. They also served, by way of their frivolity, to define the leisure class in Montana's small towns and connect it with the aristocratic leisure-class in larger progressive urban areas.

It could be said that Nellie and Katherine enjoyed what may be interpreted as a coming-out season. The two years preceding their respective weddings were filled with parties, entertainments, social visits, and young peoples' gatherings. All of the events were assiduously noted in the social columns of the local weekly papers, and scarcely a week went by without mention of the Dullea sisters.<sup>4</sup> Their upper middle-class background automatically placed the entire Dullea family under public scrutiny, and, possibly due to the girls' charm and vivacity, the reports of their

activities showed obvious support and approval.

On January 2, 1903, a quarter page article appeared in the *Madison Monitor*. It was headlined "For the Benefit of Twin Bridges: These Young Ladies Will Assist in the Coming Entertainment." A play titled "The Streets of New York" and produced by the Degree of Honor women's club was to debut with Nellie, Katherine, and Marie Lott playing key roles. Individual photographs of the young women were included on the page. The article applauded the talents and community devotion of the young women and hoped "that the time may never come when we will be unable to secure their assistance." The three were noted to be "foremost" among the town's talented citizens who were "always ready to assist anything for the welfare of the town." Each of the three received a brief write-up. Nellie was praised for her competence in filling a demanding role, one requiring "strong acting", even though the production marked her debut in theatrical performance. In addition to expressing every confidence in her acting abilities, the article made note of her popularity, the excellent education she had just completed, and her outstanding intellectual abilities.<sup>5</sup> An interesting combination. The *Monitor* followed closely the rehearsals of the play and its multiple productions, always managing to include mention of the Dullea sisters and Marie Lott.

In addition to the play, Nellie involved herself in

several other community activities, charity balls, and fundraising events. Unwilling to be limited by her community's borders, Nellie often traveled to participate in the fundraising events of other communities.<sup>6</sup>

Nellie's social activities during the years of 1902-1904 provided a maximum of opportunities for her to be with Joseph in a socially acceptable setting. He attended most of the social events with which she was involved. Her activities also enabled her to present her best self in his presence. Her generous spirit was visible when she participated in charity work; her talents were displayed when she was involved in the play; the write-ups in the local papers made her look like quite a catch; each activity provided an opportunity to dress up and behave with charming vivacity. Joseph had to be impressed by the showing Nellie was able to make with the aid of all her social activities.

Nellie's early public life tells us she saw herself as a free and independent woman. As a young woman she probably thought she was quite adventurous and daring, as perhaps she was. But as the papers clearly illustrate, all her actions were sanctioned by a small-town that perceived itself as being on the cutting edge of American society. She did nothing that could be considered scandalous or improper. Nellie was doing what other young girls of like class did to find husbands.

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Another side of Nellie's self-definition is the extent of her political awareness and her political activism. She must have been made politically aware at an early age as a result of her father's involvement in the local Democratic party. After she met Joseph, the process of her political education could only have become more intense through her contact with his father. The two indications we have today of Nellie's political interests come from her voter registration records and from oral histories from those who knew her.

As has already been mentioned, Nellie was a staunch Democrat who greatly enjoyed discussing politics with her friends. Adelaide Gelhaus relates with relish stories of her parents and the Brownes lingering at the table after meals, arguing over the political issues confronting both the nation and state.<sup>7</sup> Nellie was in her mid-sixties when she met Margaret Hagenbarth. Yet, even at this late stage in her life, Nellie conveyed to Margaret the strength of her political beliefs and interests.<sup>8</sup>

Nellie first registered to vote in Beaverhead County on February 9, 1915, three months after woman's suffrage was legalized in Montana. She was 34 years of age.<sup>9</sup> Her registration enabled her to participate in Montana women's "newly-won access to the ballot" in 1916. Nellie was presented with two difficult decisions that year. Would she

vote a straight Democratic ticket, or cast her ballot for Republican Jeannette Rankin, one of Montana's few women running for office? Would she push for liquor prohibition, which was endorsed by both political parties' state conventions and the clergy, or would she side with the Montana Commercial and Labor League in its opposition to prohibition? The spokesmen for this group were primarily bankers, cattlemen, and labor leaders, people with whom Joseph frequently came in contact.<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to predict how Nellie voted; whether her feminist tendencies outweighed her strong support for the Democratic party, or whether her support for the spokesmen for the Commercial Labor League and her appreciation for a good drink could cause her to turn her back on her religious upbringing and the party platform. However, Adelaide Gelhaus spoke adamantly about Nellie's support for the Democratic party, so it is difficult to imagine her crossing party lines even for Jeannette Rankin. What is clear is that her family background, her marriage, her social visibility and the times--the arrival of woman's suffrage, a childhood friend whose mother was a suffragist, Jeannette Rankin's candidacy--provided a context for early and continuing political involvement by women of her class, even though her Catholicism and her family probably made her a life-long Democrat.

Nellie remained on the voter rolls in Beaverhead County



until she moved to Portland in 1920. Within three months of her return to the Browne Ranch in 1922, Nellie re-registered and maintained an active voter status until 1937.<sup>11</sup> One wonders whether she voted in each election during the years from 1932 to 1937. In 1930 she and Joseph relocated to Butte, and convenience would certainly dictate a transfer of voter registration to Silver Bow County, which she did not do. Commuting to Dillon each election day seems preposterous, yet that appears to be what the Brownes did for their voter registrations were not cancelled until June 1936 for Joseph and June 1937 for Nellie. During that time period Nellie had concerns that could be considered of greater importance than voting. She had to care for her dying mother and commit her brother in 1933 and recommit her husband in 1936 to the state hospital in Warm Springs.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that personal involvement in elections took on a minor role when compared to the realities of the day to day events in her life, yet she was not dropped from the voter rolls until 1937. She must have made time to go vote.

Nellie remained unregistered from 1937 to 1944, and then, at age 64, she registered in Butte and maintained active status until her death in 1958.<sup>13</sup> In spite of the years of non-registration, I believe Nellie placed a high importance on her voting privilege. Her re-registration in 1944 tends to indicate a voting pattern that was simply interrupted during the years of the late thirties and early

forties because of life crises, not apathy. The obvious joy she experienced while debating political issues in the Gelhaus front room cannot easily be dismissed.

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As has been discussed in the previous chapter, ranch wives of Nellie's era knew their place within a marriage. They filled a separate and distinct role as partner within the realm of the ranch house. The ambiguity of Nellie's situation is perfectly illustrated by the manner in which she chose to fulfill that role. Outward support for Joseph was without condition, but behind closed doors, within the safety of her closest friend's home, she revealed a more assertive, and maybe more manipulative spirit. There were also certain aspects of the ranch woman role Nellie was unwilling to fulfill. Most ranch wives kept gardens, but Nellie did not. Prior to their move to Portland, Joseph tended the garden and managed to raise the only watermelons in the area. After their return, the Brownes did not plant a garden, but instead purchased all vegetables.<sup>14</sup>

Ranch wives were also usually quite adroit at filling in where needed. They frequently worked outside, harnessing the horses, driving teams, feeding, plowing, doing whatever was necessary to get the job at hand completed. Nellie rarely extended her labor beyond the actual house walls. She never learned to ride horseback and kept well away from the

large animals.<sup>15</sup> She was willing to embrace only those portions of ranch life that fit with what she perceived as her role as a woman raised in a leisure-class home who had been given wifely duties.

\* \* \*

One wonders why Nellie never became involved in the movement for woman's suffrage. Marie Lott's mother had been an organizer for the suffrage meetings held in Twin Bridges and certainly Nellie must have had frequent contact with the group's proselytizing, yet she never showed the slightest interest in becoming involved. Paradoxically, she registered to vote as soon as she legally could. What can be derived from such an apparent contradiction? Her actions would lead us to conclude that she viewed herself as being liberal, independent, and assured of her rights. She was certainly politically informed. Nellie never served as a public political activist for reasons other than the need to fill perceived roles of womanhood. She enjoyed arguing politics within the comfort of her friend's home, often over a Bannock Cocktail she was served at breakfast by John Gelhaus.<sup>16</sup> Taking a public stance on political issues or societal concerns would have interfered with the pleasure she received by keeping them private. She did not get involved because most likely she did not want to.

The role required of Nellie was far from clear-cut.

Her upbringing in a pseudo-urban community nurtured an upper-class attitude that, for young women, encouraged light, meaningless social interactions. Marriage to a rural rancher who lived a life far removed from frivolous entertainments thrust her into a working ranch wife role, yet frequent interactions with friends in Dillon and Butte enabled her to step in and out of that more demanding way of life. Clearly, Nellie was an amalgamation of both "True Woman" and "New Woman". She probably thought she was fairly liberal and progressive, but in truth, she was forced to be something different; she was forced to adapt.

## II

What Nellie was and where she stood along the array of acceptable female roles for the period between 1900 and 1930 is not the vital issue. Far more crucial was whether, within the spectrum of not-true, not-new, she was able to make the transition from a flighty, "eastern" urban, class-oriented set of values and behaviors to a more mature pattern necessary for social and personal survival on a fairly isolated western ranch.

It would be no surprise if we discovered that Nellie was born with an assertive, risk-taking personality. Her actions as a young adult suggest a woman who was self-assured concerning life's decisions. Her travels, community involvements, schooling experience, and living arrangement

in Twin Bridges would have fostered increased independence and confidence. Marriage, and especially her marriage to a distant rural rancher, must have provided a sharp cultural shock, for it removed her not just from home and loved ones, but also from her secure niche as a popular, modern, society girl.

After her marriage it seems Nellie assumed a more traditional woman's role. Her name rarely appeared in the *Dillon Monitor's* social columns as for the most part she stayed home and worked hard at being a model of domesticity.<sup>17</sup> We can view her attitude during these early years of marriage in two ways. Nellie could have been laboring to fulfill the societal role of wifely domesticity. Perhaps marriage and its responsibilities awed her, maybe she felt incompetent and overwhelmed, so threw herself into her housewifely tasks with verve in an effort to overcome feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. The problem with this interpretation is the difficulty one encounters when trying to imagine housework as being of central importance to Nellie.

We could interpret the silent, quiet first decade as being the time it took Nellie to assert her ownership and control in a home previously owned and ruled by various members of Joseph's family. Perhaps Nellie was growing up and realizing that life consists of more than just a steady stream of social engagements.

Nellie and Joseph did not live in the Browne ranch house for the first two years of their marriage. Most likely they lived in the small cabin out back while Joseph Sr. and his daughter, Fannie, stayed in the big house. It was not until after the death of Joseph Sr., late in the summer of 1906, that the *Dillon Tribune* announced that Joseph and Nellie would move into the old family ranch home. Fannie left abruptly for an extended visit with aunts in Iowa, which was followed by a long stay with friends and the Frank Hagenbarths in Salt Lake City. When she did return to visit Beaverhead County in 1907, she did not stay with the Brownes. She instead chose to stay with friends in Dillon.<sup>18</sup> If Nellie did travel to Dillon to see her visiting sister-in-law, it was not reported in the papers.

It is possible that the female personalities in the Browne family were sometimes in conflict and that Nellie felt the need to clearly establish herself within her new home. She did not use her mother-in-law's fancy dishes. These were packed and stored in a small room off the main living space.<sup>19</sup> Nellie's in-laws could well have considered her to be capricious and frivolous, considering the activities of her unmarried days. One of her greatest tasks during the early years of her marriage would have been to establish herself as a person of competent authority, a woman of maturity.

\* \* \*

In her study of women on the prairie and the plains, Glenda Riley states that three characteristics enabled women to deal with the often harsh frontier conditions. These were "their ability to create a rich social life from limited resources, the tremendous reward they derived from their roles as cultural conservators, and their willingness and ability to bond to each other."<sup>20</sup> Before she married, Nellie gave every indication of possessing all three of these characteristics. After she moved to Browne's Ranch, these attributes were perhaps more difficult to achieve, but they were there, nonetheless, albeit in deeply altered form.

When Nellie moved to Browne's Ranch in 1904, she left behind her family, childhood friends, and the community that had provided for her a secure niche within the Twin Bridges society. After the heady excitement of the wedding wore off, she must have become all too aware of the contrasts between the bustle of Twin Bridges and the isolation of Browne's Ranch. Few clues indicate how Nellie coped with her separation from the almost continuous social interactions of her unmarried days. The evidence available certainly suggests, however, that she was able to create for herself a "rich social life from limited resources." Indeed, in many respects, the "rich social life" of her girlhood in the town had been as superficial as the charity it claimed for its justification and had involved class

separation, boundary creation and mate-catching as much as anything else. These were the cultural values being conserved, and the depth of most of the bondings seems to have been shallow. Now, these characteristic forms of survival acquired new forms and new meanings as Nellie, through her marriage to a rancher, even with his upper middle-class standing, truly entered the frontier.

Within months of their marriage, the Brownes made a week-long visit to friends in Dillon.<sup>21</sup> Over the next several years Joseph and Nellie gave visible signs of their desire for social contact and their ability to seek out such contact. They attended plays in Butte, visited friends in Dillon, Butte, and Twin Bridges, and entertained those friends at the ranch or the lake. They hosted Mass in their home and attended dances. They also developed long-lasting relationships with other couples who lived nearby in Melrose and Hecla.<sup>22</sup> Even so, social life was not as active for Nellie after her marriage, mainly because of her limited resources and the time-consuming responsibilities of a ranch wife.<sup>23</sup> She had to care for Joseph and the farm workers, prepare food, wash, iron, clean, sew, make butter, feed chickens and collect eggs, and find time to fulfill her obligations to the church. But these were a "social life" as well, and, beyond them it was no small accomplishment to create a social network among women who were at least as busy as she. She managed to construct a varied and rich



social life for herself.

Women of the West knew part of their responsibility to themselves and their society was to fill the role of conservators of those manners, behaviors, and articles that acted as catalysts for refinement and civility.<sup>24</sup> Like many other women in rural Montana, Nellie read a great deal. She and Joseph subscribed to both the *Anaconda Standard* and the *Dillon Tribune*.<sup>25</sup> Adelaide Gelhaus emphatically stated that not only did Nellie read these on a daily basis, she also involved herself in animated discussions on political and world issues whenever possible.<sup>26</sup> Nellie also subscribed to at least one nationally published women's magazine.<sup>27</sup> These magazines, according to Stephenie Tubbs, "actively promoted the cult of true womanhood."<sup>28</sup> Thrust in a self-imposed paradox, Nellie read articles that enabled her to strengthen her mental autonomy, yet simultaneously sought out material that was published in the context of a literature designed to keep her in her place!

Standards of cultural refinement can be upheld in ways other than through reading, and Nellie employed every means at her disposal to keep her isolated farm house on par with urban society. The table was one yardstick with which to measure civility. Nellie used nice dishes on a cloth-covered table and "always made things look nice."<sup>29</sup> The barrels full of crystal came out of the storage room when company came to sup, and her menus frequently included a

special, rare treat: strawberries, bananas, or peaches.<sup>30</sup>

Ranch life was not conducive to keeping formal dress codes. The yard was dusty or muddy. The physical labor encouraged wearing practical, simple clothing. The exertions of cooking for field hands, cleaning, lugging water for laundry, and bending over a washboard for hours precluded the wearing of lacy, fancy apparel. Yet, photographs show Nellie always fashionably and neatly dressed. Her high-necked sheer white blouses look crisp and clean; her skirts are pressed. Many photos show her wearing a brooch and neatly coiffured in the latest Gibson Girl style.<sup>31</sup> Thelma Kalsta was a young teenager when she worked for Nellie, yet she remembers the awe and admiration she felt for Nellie's wardrobe.<sup>32</sup>

Without children of her own to whom she could pass along a heritage of social civility and cultural enrichment, Nellie did the next best thing by serving as a conservator for her friends' children. She and Joseph loved children and freely opened their home to the offspring of their close friends and relatives. Donna Darby, Nellie's second cousin, remembers her as a sophisticated charming lady. Nellie was an extended grandma who broadened Donna's horizons by serving her creamed onions for lunch one day in her tiny apartment in Butte.<sup>33</sup> Margaret Streb Gransbery proudly displays the lovely and delicate crystal vase Nellie presented to her as a wedding gift.<sup>34</sup> Adelaide Gelhaus

remembers not so much the specifics but the overall impression Nellie left with her. "[Nellie] dressed things up. Her home looked like a home. It was comfortable. You know, how some people have a knack of making a home? Hers was welcoming."<sup>35</sup> It is the memories of these people that serve as evidence of Nellie's success as a conservator of domestic values.

Women's clubs were an important tool for western women anxious to preserve and extend cultural and intellectual pursuits. In her article, "Montana Women's Clubs at the Turn of the Century," Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs wrote that the clubs enabled Montana women to further their literary knowledge, encourage general self-improvement, and reform their society. Such a focus in a formal organization encouraged women to align with one another to act as guardians of virtue and morality. Recognition of themselves as a bonded sisterhood provided them with strength in their "persistent demand for self-expression and involvement outside the home."<sup>36</sup> Montana women's clubs blended the hearthside concerns of the True Woman with a progressive spirit of outside involvement.

Nellie was an involved member of the Melrose Women's Club. The purpose of her organization appears to be that of self-improvement, education, and socialization. Each roll call had a theme which required self-reflection and encouraged correction. In the December meeting of 1925 each

participant had to respond to the call by stating one thing she did to keep herself well. Singing was another important part of the meeting, as were the discussions on health and social concerns.<sup>37</sup> The Melrose Women's Club was an important part of the local female community, and Nellie's active participation involved her in the shaping of the total environment.

The various activities with which Nellie involved herself had a purpose and a value. Her avid perusal of national news and the traditional women's magazines from the east seem to indicate a conflict of interests. Yet, the perceived opposition disappears when we recognize both the traditional magazines and the newspapers as merely two tools Nellie used to insure her own intellectual development as well as an outwardly correct social attitude. Her neat and fashionable dress, the properly-set table, the outreach to young daughters of close friends, and her participation in the local women's club were all avenues Nellie used to perpetuate the culture she had been taught to appreciate.

The third characteristic Glenda Riley stated was necessary to give women the strength to deal with the toil, isolation, primitiveness, and loneliness of the frontier was "their willingness and ability to bond to each other."<sup>38</sup> Making friends was Nellie's forte, and these friends remained loyal. One wonders if it was not that one special ability that gave her the resources with which to endure the

years of poverty, mental illness, and familial discord. For Nellie, friendship was more than a value and empathy was more than a charity. Both were part of a coping mechanism in which she was once again creating a rich social life from limited resources and acting as a cultural conservator. Through her friendships she created the only society a woman on a ranch could have, a community of women, independent of geography, connected through occasional visits, calls, and frequent letters. Thus, that bonding which had so deep a value for her was perhaps as much a function of her situation and needs as of her character.

Nellie's friends were not limited to women in southwest Montana. She received warm, caring letters from women as far away as San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Portland. A letter from one of Nellie's Butte friends written on April 22, 1927, provides us with a glimpse of a time-weathered relationship that had taken the participants from the joyful, lighthearted days of young adulthood to the more mature days when one realizes that the world is not perfect.

Dear Nell;

I was so glad to get your letter last night even though I had a good cry over it. My heart aches for you, Nell, and I'm so powerless to help you in any way. It only seems yesterday since we were all so happy together and when Kate and her little ones were there and me with mine were all at your place together, life seemed a very peacefull (sic) thing then...I used to think Mama was a foolish woman when she said I was having my happiest time then but I can see now where she was right and I guess it was the same with all of us...I would love to come down some Sun. to see you if

you would be home...I only pray God to give you all the comfort he can, you sure need it.

Lovingly,  
Kate<sup>39</sup>

Kate decried her ability to help, yet she did. Nellie knew she was loved and was being thought of. Kate's prayers would also give her hope and peace of mind. Ultimately, though, Kate made plain her plans to visit her old friend. The letter included details of who would drive Kate to the station, and how Nellie could get in touch with her during work hours. These women were there for one another.

Another friend quick to prove her worth in times of trouble was Cassie Laird, a school administrator also from Butte. She had been a friend of Nellie's during her girlhood and made visits to the Brownes in the early days of their marriage.<sup>40</sup> Twenty-three years later, days after Joseph was sent to the hospital, Cassie and her sister, Helen, were at the ranch, bringing distraction and an afternoon of fun. Cassie's bread and butter letter dated April 20, 1927, provided practical help as well as mental support. It included information on inexpensive housing in Butte for Nellie who must have been contemplating the possibility of a drastic lifestyle change. Cassie wrote with optimism and love, but also included a dash of what she knew Nellie loved most--gossip!<sup>41</sup>

The letters written to Nellie over the years reveal the

personalities of their writers. The commonality they all possess is their devotion to Nellie. Her friends loved her.<sup>42</sup> She managed to establish strong bonds of caring and then maintained those bonds over several years.

Reflecting back to the questions posed above, Nellie's role in Montana society was probably typical of most other women's during that era and within a similar environment. Stephenie Tubbs writes that Montana women wanted to build "a proper sort of society," and that public service and community activities were one way of achieving that goal.<sup>43</sup> The realities of ranch life slowed Nellie's public service and perhaps altered its direction, but a lack of spare hours never eliminated service from her lifestyle. Nellie gained as much as she gave in social interactions. The hours spent sharing with Anna Gelhaus not only provided Nellie with riveting gossip and an assured forum for touting political beliefs, the hours these women spent talking together enabled them to clarify their ideas concerning the changes occurring in lifestyles and the roles within their marriages. It supplied them with an opportunity to share and perhaps make suggestions concerning personal issues, and it gave each of them a brief respite from a life of isolation and drudgery. In all these ways, Nellie and her women associates and friends, far and near, created a society and conferred and clarified values where otherwise there would have been isolation. Ranch life both forced and

permitted Nellie to mature. Far from the town girl of the newspaper society pages, she was now a western woman, actively creating and maintaining a world where none would otherwise have existed.

So the issue, for Nellie, was never whether she conformed to the most stifling imperatives of the Cult of True Womanhood. Few women ever had, and by 1904, in the West, change and circumstance had freed Nellie and her young friends from the strictures of Victorian society. They could choose to be publicly active, even in mixed groups, to live alone, to agitate for the suffrage, and by 1915 to vote, or of course, to refrain from public participation of any kind. Rather, the issue for Nellie was whether a flighty town girl had underneath that ingenuous exterior the creativity to develop meaningful social contacts and maintain culture in the face of isolation. The answer is that she did.

Looking back on the past two chapters, it seems silly to even ask whether True Womanhood was Nellie's priority. She was a creature of her time and of her situation and of herself. Did Nellie's societal role enable her to break free of the requisite profile of hearthside domesticity and submission? The question was the wrong one to ask, for it is difficult to imagine Nellie struggling to break free of anything, except perhaps from the confines of an overdrawn checkbook. Hers was not a submissive personality, and



apparently she never felt compelled to pretend to Joseph or to her closest friends to have that quality. Those who knew her recognized the love she had for her husband. I believe she did things for him because she loved him, not because *Godey's Ladies Book* instructed her to be submissive and domestic. Her motivation involved the desire for their life together to be satisfying and enjoyable, which apparently also included the recognition of his need to appear publicly as the man in charge.

In spite of attestations to her comfortable home, delicious meals, her skills as a seamstress, and her abilities to clean, wash, and iron, Nellie somehow refuses to fit the Victorian mold of a domestic wife. The strength of her personality involved her in social interactions. A self-imposed system of appropriateness dictated her behavior. Through the process of her own maturity, she gained the skills necessary for her to survive in the certainly rugged transformation from cossetted pet of small-town society to enduring conservator of culture on the western frontier.

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30. Thelma Kalsta, interview; Bradley Collection, grocery  
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32. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
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37. Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs, "Montana Women's Clubs", 27.
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39. Bradley Collection, letter from Kate, 22 April 1927.

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CHAPTER IV  
COPING WITH FAMILY CRISES

To say that Nellie's set of personal values left her considerable leeway and power within the transitional gender roles of her day and place, and to say that she successfully negotiated the transition from town girl/social butterfly to ranch woman creating, under difficult circumstances, a social world of her own, is still to ignore perhaps the most crucial transition of her life. She, like so many other married ranch women, eventually had to assume the entire role of family manager. In her case, this role encompassed not merely her siblings and the family estate, but also her husband who broke down entirely from the stress of running a ranch in hard times beneath the shadow of a successful father. Beginning in 1927, when Joseph was 51 and Nellie 47, she functioned as head of the family. Responsibility came to her as it did to nearly all women who either survived their husbands or were forced by other circumstances to take over the helm. She shouldered that responsibility and acquitted herself well. She was ready, if one can ever be so, for this final autonomy when it was thrust upon her.

But there is an added dimension to Nellie's story which

leads us to look back at her values, spirit, social world, and evolution into autonomous responsibility quite differently. In the end, it was all too much for her. Living alone in Butte, on welfare, her husband first a common mine worker, then incarcerated again, then dead, Nellie broke down a bit herself. Her upbringing and ideas concerning acceptable conduct would not allow anything as vulgar as plaguing her friends with self-pitying tales of woe, or as tawdry as having a nervous breakdown, so Nellie's eventual inability to cope showed itself in two marginal behaviors, drinking and gambling. While ever presenting a cheerful face to the world, which at the end was primarily composed of a few faithful friends and relatives, Nellie lived out her days playing keno and enjoying her "nips". She had gone through too many transitions, walked the fine line between submission and initiative in the family, earlier made the shift from town to ranch woman, adjusted to the disappointment of the return from Portland, and finally held too much responsibility with too little support.

Estranged from her sister, separated by death from a mother who had always given her backing and from a husband who, while he remained alive, existed in a world of his own, Nellie crumbled. She had been all things to all men and women, including herself, and finally, sustained only by occasional visits from distant friends and kin, the cheerful ranch woman facade was eroded by her residence in Butte.

She found support elsewhere. The outcome of her success story would be familiar to modern feminists, burdened with the pressures of career and children, marriage and feminism; and especially to those who, for some reason, lose their network of family and friends. Let us look in detail at the textures of this story before examining its implications in a more theoretical perspective.

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An inspection of three episodes from Nellie's life will help in our effort to understand how she was prepared to assume the family reins of leadership, yet why she ultimately could not carry on when left alone. These three scenes, dating from 1915, 1922, and 1927, respectively, show an ever increasing ability to take control of her life. However, they also show that Nellie never had to act without some form of support. This security, substantial at first and gradually weaned from her as the years passed, was never entirely removed until that time when total responsibility for herself, Clarence, Joseph, and the ranch was laid at her feet. The episodes make obvious the case of a woman growing in potential and competency who could have become truly autonomous had she not, in the end, been hopelessly overburdened by an onus which, nonetheless, speaks of so many women's lives of her time and place.

The first situation occurred during 1915 and concerns

the circumstances surrounding Nellie's appointment as Clarence's legal guardian. In the representation of Nellie's interests with relation to Clarence's estate, the legal firm of Norris, Hurd, and Collins corresponded with her on 17 separate occasions during the months between June 1915 and February 1916. All but one of the letters were written by one of the firm's partners and were addressed specifically to Nellie. The exception, written by an office employee, was addressed to Joseph and contained information concerning one of the Dullea family land holdings.

The language of the letters was indicative of the firm's understanding of Nellie's right to conduct legal affairs on her own. Nowhere in any letter did partner John Collins mention Joseph. Nellie was required to travel to Virginia City to attend hearings, and though Collins demanded that Clarence appear, though he suggested that Mary Dullea might wish to accompany her son, he never even hinted at the desirability or necessity of Joseph's presence.<sup>1</sup>

Nor should he have, for women had made great legal strides in the 19th century. Nellie had the legal right to conduct business on her own. However, just because laws were on the books does not mean they were strictly enforced.<sup>2</sup> The office worker's letter to Joseph would suggest that unless a woman's responsibilities were legally defined, as in the case of Nellie's guardianship, the business community assumed that a husband, rather than a



wife, was in charge. Yet, with the exception of that one letter to Joseph, Nellie was the one with whom the firm dealt, leading us to believe that she was not only being accorded, but also using, her legal rights.

After Judge Clark approved Nellie as Clarence's guardian she initiated legal proceedings that would enable her to sell Clarence's real estate. Once again she had to appear in court, this time in Dillon. Collins suggested she take the morning train from Melrose and pointed out that no other witnesses were necessary.<sup>3</sup> She alone was again expected to handle the legal procedures.

Because Joseph's name was omitted in the letters, it is difficult to determine the extent of his involvement. He and Nellie both wrote checks to pay the costs incurred in the legal process. The clearest evidence of his role as a support person rather than the major player was her actual involvement in the entire operation. If she had been unwilling to take the risks inherent in moving away from the comforts and securities of traditional niches and into "a world in which one acts and chooses", she would have passed the entire procedural responsibility over to Joseph, signing documents when instructed, appearing in court when required, but otherwise relinquishing an active role.<sup>4</sup> If she had chosen that route, all the letters would have been addressed to Joseph with instructions to him on her behalf. It seems that Nellie not only expected to conduct her own affairs,

but managed to convey that assumption to others as well.

Still, Joseph was there, conferring, advising, undoubtedly taking on some of the burdensome tasks legal procedures necessitate. He went to Dillon with Nellie when she had to appear in court.<sup>5</sup> He probably traveled with her to Virginia City as well. His very presence provided her with the company and listening ear we all so much appreciate when experiencing foreign territory. As capable as she was, Nellie was not expected to proceed without support.

The second episode occurred seven years later in 1922. Joseph and Nellie were living in Portland and contemplating the disappointing move back to Browne's Ranch. Prior to this date and outside of her role as Clarence's guardian, Nellie had left all land sales, leases and transfers to Joseph. He had found all buyers, renters, and worked out all terms of agreement.<sup>6</sup> The sale of their Portland home broke with tradition, providing the opportunity, even out of circumstantial necessity, for Nellie to assume the leading role.

Joseph returned to Montana in April, leaving Nellie with the responsibility of locating a buyer, arranging the sale, and shipping the household goods to Melrose. She was quite successful, for in June she and a woman named Emily Yokum signed an informal agreement that spelled out the sale terms and detailed an accurate schedule of payments. The final agreement was signed by Nellie and Emily's husband,

Robert, and specified a \$3000 down payment on the \$8150 purchase price. Nellie's deal netted the Brownes a capital gain of \$1369. Final acknowledgement of Nellie's responsibility for the house sale came from Portland Trust Company which carried the Yokum loan. Their annual statement of account detailing the condition of the loan was directed and addressed exclusively to Nellie. Even though the sale definitely affected Joseph's future, he took a back seat throughout the affair. Nellie managed it on her own. She then completed her job by crating her sewing machine, the bedding, and five crates of household goods, and shipped them to Melrose.<sup>7</sup>

But, here too, she had a support network. True, Joseph was a thousand miles away, but certainly they conferred by phone. Nellie's sister, Katherine, lived close by and Nellie's numerous friends surely must have helped with the packing. If nothing else, her husband, sister, and friends provided reassurance and moral support. So even while she was assuming a greater share of the family management, Nellie was never left entirely to her own devices.

Throughout her life, we can find within Nellie behaviors we usually associate with a strong sense of independence. We see her continuously accepting challenges and changes, growing into the new roles required of her, adjusting, shifting, and realigning herself to ever-changing circumstances, but always with support.

The topic of our third episode provided the catalyst that pushed Nellie to a new plane of autonomy. At that point she truly seized control of her environment. In early March of 1927, Joseph became increasingly agitated. He was going further and further into debt despite all efforts to bail himself out. His health was again declining with the recurrence of stomach ailments. The invention he had worked so hard to license and market profitably was threatening to become a total loss. Stresses piling up ever since the Browne's return from Portland finally pushed Joseph over the brink.

His first action was to take a brand new piece of farm equipment, a seeder, out into the fields and carefully dismantle it. He concealed the parts under sage bushes in a hidden draw. Joseph then returned to the house and threatened to harm Nellie. She recognized at once the seriousness of his intentions and fled from the house.

The closest source of help was John Hand's ranch, across the Big Hole river. Nellie ran down the road, crossed Browne's Bridge, and then proceeded down the railroad tracks to the Hand place, about a quarter mile away. She explained the situation to the easy-going rancher who immediately walked over to Browne's to try to calm Joseph. Nellie stayed at the Hand ranch. Telephones were a rarity in the area, but because the phone line from Butte to Dillon ran across an easement on the Browne Ranch, a phone

had been installed in the Browne dining room. Once Hand got Joseph under control, he used this phone to call the sheriff in Dillon. By the end of the day, the sheriff arrived by train and took Joseph to the Dillon jail.<sup>8</sup>

Much was at risk for Nellie on that March day. She loved Joseph deeply, but if she stayed with him she could be severely hurt, even killed. Her escape down the railroad tracks to the neighboring Hand ranch was a run for survival. What must Nellie's thoughts have been? She had made a home for this man and shared that home for 23 years. She had cared for him, emotionally supported him, and followed him in all his ventures. Now she was fleeing from him and initiating the actions that led to his being jailed. In that one deed, Nellie discarded all the societal rules governing marriage. She threw off the mandated mantle of privacy between husband and wife, the required demeanor of wifely devotion and obedience, the taboo against revealing any shameful secrets to the public. In spite of the unspoken laws which insisted that "ladies in the home, they backed their husbands," Nellie ran from hers, and told all the sordid details necessary to get help.<sup>9</sup> Nellie knew she had to take care of herself.

Once the sheriff took Joseph to jail, Nellie had to decide what she was going to do. She could let him cool off for a few days, then come home, but that meant the possibility of recurrence. She could divorce him and go

live with her mother, but she loved him, and more to the point, that was not a viable choice for a good Catholic. Nellie's decisions and actions during the weeks following Joseph's first outburst illustrate her ability to analyze a situation, choose a course, and direct its outcome in accordance with what she deemed necessary.

Nellie was convinced that, however temporarily, Joseph was insane, so she initiated a series of actions designed to commit him to the Montana State Hospital for the Insane in Warm Springs where she hoped he could receive help. First, she visited her lawyer and through him petitioned the court to rule on an insanity charge against Joseph. Nellie then had to find two individuals willing to witness to the validity of the charge. Finally, she had to apply for legal guardianship of her husband and his estate so she could conduct business in his name.<sup>10</sup>

Nellie asked long-time friends, John Gelhaus and Albert Stamm, to serve as witnesses. Gelhaus was incredulous. He refused to act against Joseph unless he saw incontrovertible proof of his insanity. Adelaide Gelhaus related what happened next: "Joe and Nellie came to dinner because my father wouldn't believe that Joe was crazy. We had them to dinner and Joe ranted and raved all through dinner. Then my father knew. He helped Nellie take Joe to the sheriff."<sup>11</sup>

With Gelhaus and Stamm willing to act as bonded witnesses, Joseph's case was quickly processed and on March

10, 1927, he was declared "an insane and incompetent person." He was removed to Warm Springs that very day. Nellie was granted legal guardianship of both Joseph and the estate on March 31st.<sup>12</sup>

Nellie's actions tell us something about her. At no time did she become overcome by helplessness. The dinner at Gelhaus's must have been extremely painful for all present. Nellie knew she was shattering any illusions her friends may have retained concerning Joseph. Adelaide said Nellie cried throughout the meal. Yet, the exposure to friends of Joseph's state gained Nellie the witness she needed and provided her with psychological support as well. John and Anna Gelhaus remained sympathetic friends of the Brownes throughout the entire ordeal.<sup>13</sup> Nellie's approach enabled her to get things moving, to exert control over her life which had suddenly become so foreign.

Nellie also needed a free hand concerning ranch decisions. She had to formulate as many options as possible concerning her life, because the one factor she could not control was Joseph's recovery. Acquiring legal guardianship of the estate was crucial to her future, so she moved rapidly to secure it. Having done so, she could afford to wait to see how events would unfold. She explored the prospect of renting an apartment in Butte, she visited Joseph frequently, she freshened her contacts with her closest friends, and she kept the ranch going.<sup>14</sup> She had a

potential plan for every contingency.

Joseph was paroled from the State Hospital in July. Adelaide declared that Nellie was delighted. Early in 1928 she petitioned for release as his guardian and requested his reinstatement as a sane and competent person. Exactly one year from his commitment, Joseph was declared sane with all rights restored.<sup>15</sup> The Brownes were living with Mary Dullea in Silver Star at the time, for even though Nellie was elated over her husband's return, she needed the reassurance of the presence of others...just in case.<sup>16</sup>

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Joseph never resumed his role as family manager. Although friends commented on his great improvement after his stay at Warm Springs, Nellie took over as decision maker for the two of them. She orchestrated a lifestyle that controlled many of the sources of Joseph's stress and provided a degree of safety for herself. It also removed them once and for all from the ranch.

The consequences of Nellie's management decisions were both positive and negative, for while she improved both hers and Joseph's immediate situations, her actions also led to the gradual elimination of that support network which was so crucial to her well-being.

The move to Silver Star gave Nellie the comfort and care that only her mother could provide. She had someone



with whom she could intimately confide, one whose love was unconditional, who would listen to her feelings without judgement. But moving in with her mother distanced Nellie from her close circle of friends in both Melrose and Dillon. A visit with the Stamms or Gelhauses was suddenly more difficult; the daily drives to Melrose with their certain opportunities for socialization with friends were a thing of the past. And while Mary Dullea could give her daughter a special type of understanding that no one else could quite match, Mary was nearing the end of her life. In 1927 she was 78 years old; she could be expected to give Nellie support for a very few additional years. Nellie was separating herself from her friends at the very time she needed them the most.

Another aspect of the Browne's move involved the tension between Nellie and her sister, Katherine. After Katherine's commitment into the Hamilton Narcotic Institute in 1923, her close relationship with Nellie dissolved.<sup>17</sup> While Nellie had remained at the ranch she had been able to maintain a low profile where her sister was concerned. However, by returning to her childhood home, Nellie thrust herself into the thick of an argument that was to escalate into an all-out struggle for control between Katherine and Mary. At stake for Katherine had to be her authority within a family who knew her weaknesses from the past. She challenged her mother in the two areas Mary would be

guaranteed to fight back; money management and Clarence's welfare. Nellie would have undoubtedly supported Mary in the ensuing quarrels, and in doing so, would have focused Katherine's rage on herself as well. Nellie and Joseph moved out of the Silver Star home and into Butte in 1930. Two years later Katherine filed a civil suit against Mary on the grounds that she was selling off chunks of the estate of deceased John Francis Dullea and was refusing to be held accountable to Katherine as to the condition of the estate. When first challenged, Mary countered with a threat to dissipate all trust funds, giving Clarence an amount of money that would have deprived Katherine of her share. Katherine's suit petitioned for a restraining order that would prohibit any future spending by Mary and would appoint an administrator over the estate to preserve intact all remaining money.<sup>18</sup>

Katherine dismissed the suit four days after she filed it, but she had already showed her hand; she would fight both her sister and her mother at every turn from that point on.<sup>19</sup> In the spring of 1933 Nellie, with her mother's approval, had Clarence committed. This so infuriated Katherine that she looked into legal proceedings to have Nellie removed as Clarence's estate guardian. While she failed in this endeavor, she must have made Nellie's life miserable with her steady stream of accusations and recriminations. After Mary's death, Katherine and Nellie

were at such odds, only court intervention enabled them to finally settle their mother's estate.<sup>20</sup>

The impact all this struggle had on Nellie is difficult to determine. We can certainly see, however, that such discord served to widen the chasm between the sisters to the point that it was untraversable. If ever there was a time Nellie needed the support of her sister it was after she moved to Butte, but any hope of reconciliation was dashed by the emotional events that occurred during and as a result of Nellie and Joseph's stay in Silver Star. Instead, Nellie and Katherine, filled with hostility, permanently turned their backs on each other.

We can make a case for Nellie's inadvertent distancing of herself from friends and family when we consider her physical separation from her community of female friends and the totality of her emotional separation from her sister, but there remains one final factor that she did not consider when she took over managing for herself and Joseph. The move to Butte should have provided her with rich opportunities for making new friends and re-establishing ties with ones from the past. Nonetheless, her efforts had to be thwarted by the four moves they made during the first four years in Butte.<sup>21</sup> A constant change in homes and neighborhoods may have given the Brownes ever improving living conditions, but it severely limited Nellie's ability to forge firm bonds of friendship with her new neighbors.

The existence of a different type of distancing added to the further dismantling of Nellie's support system, and this one involved her psychological dependence upon the Catholic church. People with a deep religious faith tend to reaffirm their devotion to God in times of stress. They renew their commitment through increased prayer, church attendance, Bible study, and a reliance on the physical symbols of their religious beliefs. Interestingly, while Nellie maintained her ties to the Catholic church throughout her lifetime, she took none of her personal articles of faith with her when she moved to Butte. The Catholic Bible, her ebony and brass crucifix, the document granting apostolic benediction from the Pope, the silver baptismal bowl, and her painting of the Sacred Heart were all left at Browne's Ranch.

And, it was not as if Nellie had simply forgotten their existence. The Verbances telephoned her to remind her of the personal items she had left behind, but she reclaimed only her two barrels of crystal which she then sold to a Butte jeweler.<sup>22</sup> She ignored the religious artifacts that had meant so much to her years earlier. She also left behind all the warm letters of comfort written by Reverend Clifford as well as her own handwritten prayer.

Perhaps Nellie's religious outlook had matured to the point at which a reliance on physical articles of faith was no longer necessary. Perhaps prayer and attending mass

sustained her to the extent that all else was extraneous. Or, perhaps her disinterest in these articles indicates a certain loss of faith, an unwillingness to devote any more time to artifacts that had failed to ease her painful situation. Ultimately, however, Nellie succeeded in merely depriving herself of another facet of her support system. Why she chose to do so remains a mystery.

Beneath distancing and mobility, there was another factor at work in the final breakdown of her support system, the mental illness factor, for mental illness was so stigmatized in Nellie's time that it, too, would have contributed to her increasing isolation.

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Around the turn of the century, mental care institutions underwent sweeping changes. The role of the asylum, up until the late 1800s, had been as an incarceration unit designed to separate the deranged and unfit from the rest of society. Attitudinal changes among the public and an effort by the American psychiatric profession to modernize their practice and increase their professional validity initiated a national movement towards replacing asylums with state hospitals. The role of the hospital was to focus on rehabilitation and cure through the use of modern treatments and therapy programs: hydrotherapy, electro-shock, lobotomy, and insulin shock. "Patients" (not

"inmates") were admitted and given comprehensive physical and psychological assessment tests before programs of treatment were prescribed. Detailed reports were filed on each patient with progress and setbacks assiduously documented. These dramatic changes reflected the Progressive belief among both the medical community and the public sector that science and social concern could combine to create "a harmonious and disease-free future."<sup>23</sup>

To understand why this utopia never evolved one must examine two elements, the typical composite of mental patients in the hospital and the impact of government control. Most patients housed in the state hospitals could not be cured by the means then applied, or at all. Illnesses such as senility, mental retardation, paresis, schizophrenia, alcoholism, and manic depression were not improved by the existing medical treatments or by psychiatric intervention. According to Gerald Grob, "Most patients simply needed custodial care - food, shelter, friendship, and perhaps a few chores to feel useful." Psychiatrists, anxious to display their abilities to society in general and to the medical profession in particular, became unwilling to waste potentially brilliant careers in dead-end state facilities. They abandoned the thought of curing institutionalized patients and focused on the more scientific approaches to mental health occurring in private practices and research institutes. In refusing to represent

the needs of the chronic patients, psychiatrists encouraged a public attitude towards mental institutions as repositories for the aged, the poor, the chronically ill, and the socially undesirable.<sup>24</sup>

The government's role in undermining the success of state hospitals occurred through its regulatory capacity. State agencies who controlled admission regulations were quite willing to cooperate with county welfare and law enforcement departments who did not want indigents and borderline elderly cluttering their communities. As Montana State Hospital Superintendent B. L. Pampel expressed it in 1944, "Old people who are difficult, disagreeable and expensive to care for who manifest symptoms of mental weakness as forgetfulness, untidiness, combativeness and the like are borderline cases of insanity that are, nevertheless, committed...."<sup>25</sup> But while state agencies were allowing an increased population within the institutions, they concurrently enacted policies that encouraged funding cuts. "Indeed, the overcrowding and confusion that arose in state hospitals under the supervision of this bureaucratic 'expert' class were often the result of 'efficient' appropriations that did not keep pace with substantially increasing patient populations."<sup>26</sup> Liberal commitment policies made more funding necessary; conservative managerial policies made less funding available.

The Montana State Hospital in Warm Springs mirrored the

plight of state hospitals nation-wide. In his 1928 letter to the Montana State Legislature, Superintendent H. A. Bolton pleaded with the State Board Commissioners to recognize the needs of the facility. Crowded conditions had been present for the entire biennium; "overcrowding for many months, not only as to beds, but in dining rooms and other sections." The forty criminally insane patients were housed with the other patients; conditions of antiquation and inadequacy were found in the male receiving hospital, the doctors quarters, men's dorms, and the heating plant.<sup>27</sup>

The 1944 letter submitted by Superintendent B. L. Pampel described conditions much worse. By then, the ward buildings were "filled with cots crowded together with insufficient breathing and floor space." Thirty people shared a bathroom that contained just one bathtub and one toilet. Even the most modern building, the male receiving hospital that was finally constructed in 1936, was sadly inadequate and ill-equipped, yet overflowing with patients.<sup>28</sup> Pampel's letter was a scathing invective against an agency who had turned its back on the deplorable conditions their admissions policies had encouraged. Pampel finished by informing the commissioners that "unless provisions are made to give the patients modern treatment the institution is really a boarding house or an asylum for the patients and not a state hospital."<sup>29</sup> In Montana, as no doubt elsewhere, the sweeping changes brought on by Progressive reform had



come full circle, and all was as it had been the previous century. In spite of its name change, the Montana State Hospital had not been able to alter its primary purpose, to segregate the undesirables from the rest of society.

Public opinion towards committed individuals during the first half of the 20th century was probably influenced by what has been portrayed as an "alarmist period characterized by a social hysteria concerning mental illness."<sup>30</sup> The mentally deficient were described by one researcher in 1915 as being "a menace to society and civilization...responsible in a large degree for many, if not all, our social problems."<sup>31</sup> A psychologist of the same era claimed "they cause unutterable sorrow at home and are a menace and danger to the community."<sup>32</sup>

Though psychologists adjusted their opinions, the negative view of the mentally ill survived in the minds of the public. In 1934, the hospitalized were "misunderstood, unwanted, neglected, ridiculed, maligned, thwarted, abused; often curable but not often cured..; whose loneliness in delusion [woke] contempt instead of compassion."<sup>33</sup> The special lexicon developed to refer to state hospitals conveyed the public's mind-set: nut-house, loony-bin, crazy house, and booby-hatch all carried the implications of incarceration and hopelessness, but not healing.<sup>34</sup> The public had remained far from sympathetic toward the mentally ill.

The lack of adequate government support for state hospitals during the first half of the 20th century could simply be a reflection of public attitudes. When society views a specific identified sector of itself with feelings of fear, ignorance, and suspicion, it is not going to want to voluntarily spend money for the betterment of that sector. In the presence of such negative feelings, it would be expected that family attitudes would reflect this hostility. After a lengthy study of early 20th century American institutions, one doctor claimed, "Many of these patients have been practically forgotten by their relatives, and the hospital has made little or no effort to prevent that forgetting or to freshen and strengthen the sense of family obligation."<sup>35</sup> It seems that families were just as glad to conceal and forget their undesirable members as was society as a whole.

For all these reasons, then, by 1927 Montana's state hospital was a holding bin, a dumping ground for the indigent homeless, the elderly, the addicts, and the handicapped. In spite of the attempts by its superintendents to modernize and improve the facility, it remained an overcrowded, underfunded asylum for those marginal members of society who either lacked families, or whose families did not want to care for them. A study of the case files bears out this conclusion. During the biennium from December 1, 1926, to November 30, 1928, six

hundred new patients were admitted to the hospital. Of this number, ninety-five percent were classified as either indigent or marginally so. Twenty-three percent were committed because of senility or cerebral hardening of the arteries, fourteen percent for drug addiction (including alcoholism), eight percent for mental deficiency, and four percent for epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, or encephalitis. Twenty-three percent were committed because they were manic depressive or melancholic.<sup>36</sup> Most of the hospitalized were there mainly because they acted as an inconvenience or an embarrassment for the public.

Studies of individual cases provide substantial evidence of similar attitudes among family members of the committed. One file contains a letter from the patient's sister-in-law, concerned about the possibility of mental illness being hereditary. That patient's sister also wrote, out of concern, but revealed that she had been too ashamed to share the news of her brother's commitment with her other relatives. Another patient was frequently visited by his wife, but she also kept secret the fact of his commitment; her husband's siblings were shocked when they later learned of his illness.

One man was committed in 1925 for obscenity, neglectful and careless habits, and having delusions. He was epileptic and died in the hospital in 1927. His family could not be located at the time of his death. A woman, admitted in

1916, was a morphine addict and had syphilis. She was never visited during the two years of her commitment, although her brother did write to determine the cause of her incarceration. A male patient, admitted in 1923, lived in the hospital for 18 years. He had 5 visitors during that entire time. Another patient from Dillon had both a son and a brother living in Butte, less than 30 miles from Warm Springs, yet he received only 6 visits during his 2 year stay. The superintendent received a telegram from the sister of a deceased patient committed for senility. It stated quite simply, "Bury there." A 16 month-old girl from Butte was hospitalized because she had spina bifida. Another Butte resident, a woman who lived with her son, was admitted in 1926 and died 3 years later. Her son never once came to visit. A Flathead area woman committed by her husband for delusions and because she had been unable to sleep was hospitalized for 14 months. Although he wrote 5 letters to the superintendent inquiring as to her well-being, he never visited her.<sup>37</sup> File after file told the same tale of individuals who, once taken to Warm Springs and admitted, were ignored by their families.

There are exceptions to be found. A young girl suffering from schizophrenia was frequently visited by both her parents and received many letters and packages. A woman whose husband suffered from acute dementia asked Superintendent Bolton for a job at the hospital so she could

live near her husband.<sup>38</sup> And Nellie visited her brother and husband regularly, frequently bringing both gifts and friends with her.<sup>39</sup> But these were exceptions to the hundreds of case files that contained no visitor passes or letters of inquiry. For the most part, patients were admitted, some for the flimsiest of reasons, and promptly forgotten.

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When Joseph first entered the Montana State Hospital in 1927, Nellie entered the dark world of shame as wife of a mental patient. So long as she was surrounded by her friends, she could weather, and try to ignore, that burden of shame. The letters from all her friends in 1927 were affirmations from people who enjoyed a close relationship with the Brownes. They knew Joseph as a personable man with a delightful sense of humor and a deep love for his wife. Within that context, his mental illness was a dreadfully unfortunate departure from a state of health, and everyone wished for his speedy recovery. But, once Nellie moved to Butte, once she initiated actions that distanced her from the friends of her past, she became vulnerable to all the mistrust, fear, and the rejection with which society viewed the institutionalized. It seems highly unlikely that Nellie ever could have recreated a support group in Butte, for once people found out about Joseph, barriers would be raised

against which she had no recourse. She, as his wife, would be included in all the feelings of suspicion and renunciation society held towards the mentally ill. As Clarence's sister, she was doubly damned, for not only was she tainted by way of her marriage, but the seed of abnormality was also contained in her familial bloodstream. Yet, if she kept all this secret, she incurred a different kind of burden.

With the combined effects of the move from her known community of friends, the irreconcilable separation from Katherine, the death of Mary, the constant moves to new neighborhoods in Butte, and the public's negative attitudes towards mental patients, Nellie's support system was damaged beyond repair. Certainly, her old friends maintained their regard and concern for her, but as the years passed they became more and more distanced. To be sure, Nellie did meet new people and form new friendships, but these friends tended to be women in much the same boat as herself, women who were suddenly thrust into family management positions with inadequate training, support, and financial backing.

One such friend was Mary L. Gold, a woman whose husband suffered from mental deterioration and was in the Montana State Hospital during the time of Joseph's first commitment. After Mr. Gold's death, late in 1927, Mary responded to Nellie's letter of sympathy and condolence. In her response, she gave vent to her innermost feelings and

thoughts and hinted at the uncertainty and confusion produced by the sudden changes in her life. She wrote:

"I do not grieve for Mr. Gold, Mrs. Brown. He is happy now and can think clearly. He use [sic] to say each day 'Mary what has come over me'. Then he would plead with me not to leave him and I didnt [sic]. I took him back with me [to Browning] and laid him to rest facing the mountains...I wish he could have died at home, but I did not have strong enough faith to take that step...You know I am housekeeper in the Montana State Tubercular sanitarium. I thought Mr. Gold would last through the winter and I wanted to be near him and took this position...So I will stay here this winter...If you and Mr. Brown are passing you will stop and see me.

Sincerely I remain yours,  
Mary L. Gold<sup>40</sup>

In her letter, Mary Gold reveals the uncertain life of a woman forced to take charge after a lifetime of dependency. She shows the doubts as to her own adequacy, her willingness to follow her husband anywhere, without considering the consequences of such a sacrifice once he died. She put her health at risk by becoming employed in the tuberculosis sanitarium just to be near him, yet after her husband died, she was stuck there. Her demand that Nellie and Joseph stop to visit could be interpreted as a sign of the extent of their welcome or we could see it as a desperate call for company by a lonely old woman. It is difficult to perceive Nellie's new friends as being able to provide her with a support group when they were so needy themselves.

After Joseph's third and final commitment in March of 1936, Nellie spent the remainder of her life alone in Butte. Occasionally her friends from the past stopped in for a visit. And once she moved to the small one-room apartment above Woolworths, she developed a close relationship with another woman from her building, a poor, elderly, lonely woman much like herself. But for all intents and purposes, Nellie was alone.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the last thirteen years of Nellie's life present a fairly grim picture. Having spent the \$3500 borrowed from Clarence's trust in 1935, the \$6000 inheritance from Mary Dullea in 1936, and the \$10,000 from the sale of the Browne Ranch in 1941, Nellie lived out the years from 1945 to 1958 subsisting on checks from Montana's State Department of Public Welfare that provided her with \$40 to \$78 per month. She also received financial help from her nephew, David Hagenbarth.<sup>42</sup> She spent her days making visits to Joseph, playing keno, and gossiping with a friend whose situation was certainly as bleak as her own.

In spite of the lonely and tragic appearance of her final years, it is important for us to recognize that Nellie's indomitable spirit never gave out. Even while her behavior hinted at the inner crumbling taking place within, she insisted on presenting to the world a face that mirrored the values she had held in an earlier time: warmth, cheerfulness, devotion, and loyalty.



She rarely mentioned Joseph's condition to her friends, and when she did, it was to remark on particulars, never to complain. After one visit to him, she told Margaret Streb Gransbery that the only way she had been able to keep him quiet was by providing him with paper upon which he could make his lists.<sup>43</sup> Joseph was a notorious list maker who had always inventoried belongings, workers, hours, yields, costs, all aspects of his life that could be catalogued, and the habit was deeply ingrained.

This type of casual comment seemed to be as far as Nellie was willing to go in sharing, even with her old friends, her feelings concerning Joseph. As Adelaide Gelhaus said, "She didn't talk about Joe being sent away when I was around."<sup>44</sup> Her loyalty to him prohibited itemizing his weaknesses and failures or suggesting that he had let her down. This one incident also discloses other traits of Nellie's, such as her flexibility and willingness to see the humor in most situations. After discovering the extent of Joseph's agitation that day, Nellie could have just left to try again another day. She did not. Just like a mother with a noisy child in church, Nellie pulled from her purse the items necessary to distract and appease her restless husband. In her sharing with Margaret Gransbery, Nellie revealed an attitude of tolerance, a nurturing nature, and a gentle humor concerning the link between her husband's old habits and new needs.

Nellie maintained her cheerfulness throughout her life. Many who knew her remarked on her ability to convey to others a positive outlook. When asked if, in light of the difficulties of her last years, Nellie ever got down in the dumps, Mack Poole said, "No. She just seemed natural like she was, you know. She was one of those people that didn't complain." The image she presented to Margaret Hagenbarth, her young niece-in-law, was that of "a lovely lady. Lots of fun." Adelaide Gelhaus has perhaps the most realistic grasp of Nellie's personality. She admitted that Nellie "got down". Even so, Nellie's upbringing would not allow her to show it, for as Adelaide continued, "she never let it show, she was always up when we visited."<sup>45</sup> Nellie's code of behavior that had always insisted on presenting a happy face to the world was maintained to the end, in spite of a life many would describe as being depressing.

When Nellie died, on October 25, 1958, her remains were taken to the Silver Star Cemetery, located on a hill overlooking the small town. The Dullea family plot, one of the more impressive ones in the cemetery, is delineated with a low wall and a large stone engraved "Dullea". Within the wall lie the graves of Mary and John Francis along with those of their sons, Clarence and John Robert. Nellie's grave was placed next to Joseph's, which lay just to the northwest of the Dullea family plot. The town dump lies adjacent to the cemetery and its road is easy to mistake for

the road to the cemetery. Nellie's funeral procession inadvertently took the one to the dump and had to backtrack after the error was realized. One relative remarked that Nellie probably would have gotten a kick out of the mistake and would most likely have remarked that the dump was the more appropriate final resting place for her anyway.<sup>46</sup> This comment, as heartbreaking as it is, shows how well Nellie's unwillingness to take herself too seriously was communicated to others. Her humorous spirit, though self-deprecating at times, never left her. Even after shouldering the burden of managing her unraveling family, even after her own partial disintegration, even after the disheartening final years of loneliness and poverty, Nellie was able to present to the world her charm, sparkle and wit. It is no wonder she is so fondly remembered by those who knew her. But one wonders, in turn, what it must have been like to go through what Nellie went through, and to live in a culture where only sparkle was publicly acceptable, with support groups unknown.

ENDNOTES

1. Bradley Collection, letters from Norris, Hurd & Collins and Norris, Hurd, & Smith, 20 June 1915 - 22 February 1916.
2. Norma Basch, "The Emerging Legal History of Women in the United States: Property, Divorce, and the Constitution," *Signs* 12 (Autumn 1986): 97-117; Paula Petrik, "Rights of American Indian Women," in *Western Women*, 248.
3. Bradley Collection, letters from John Collins, 13 September 1915, 16 October 1915.
4. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, 161-2.
5. Bradley Collection, bank records show Joseph wrote checks to Dillon establishments the same day Nellie was in Dillon to attend the hearing.
6. Mack Poole, interview; Bradley Collection, undated agreement with Fay Gransbery, inventories of personal property written in Joseph's handwriting attached to agreement with McKown & Crook.
7. Bradley Collection, bank records show two separate households with Joseph in Dillon and Nellie in Portland, agreement signed by Nellie and Emily Yokum, receipt from Robert L. Yokum 15 June 1922, statement of account in regards to Helen Browne - Robert Yokum 9 October 1923, freight bill from Union Pacific 7 July 1922.
8. Thelma Kalsta, interview.
9. Ibid.
10. Probate, 1:915 (Beaverhead County Courthouse).
11. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
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14. Bradley Collection, letter from Cassie Laird, 20 April 1927, responds to Nellie's inquiries concerning the apartment in the Park Building; letters from friends and Fr. Clifford refer to visiting Nellie on the ranch and ranch life and her visits to Joseph.
15. Record of Entrance and Parole Dates, Warm Springs Hospital; Adelaide Gelhaus, interview; Probate, 1:949 (Beaverhead County Courthouse).
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40. Bradley Collection, letter from Mary L. Gold, 9 December 1927.
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42. Probate 1616, 1223 (Madison County Courthouse); Mack Poole, interview; Probate, 6222 (Butte-Silver Bow County Courthouse).
43. Margaret Streb Gransbery, interview.
44. Adelaide Gelhaus, interview.
45. Mack Poole, Margaret Hagenbarth, Adelaide Gelhaus, interviews.
46. Donna Darby, interview.

## CONCLUSION

An old western ballad describes the West as a place of abundance, a place "where seldom is heard a discouraging word," and one flawless day follows another. Appearances would suggest that the promise of this song was realized for John and Mary Dullea, just as it was for Joseph, Sr. and Agnes Browne. Both couples arrived in Montana when so much of the land's resources were fresh, untapped, and waiting. Opportunities abounded for those who came to Montana in the second half of the 19th century, people who approached their new environment with energy and a readiness to take risks. Both the Brownes and the Dulleas saw their migration as a gamble, with prosperity as the prize. They invested enthusiastically in ventures that seemed to be sure bets and in most cases came out winners. Discouraging words were not a consequential part of their vocabularies.

Perhaps the parents, too eager to provide their offspring with the social graces and position they themselves had fought so hard to attain, neglected to instill in the new generation the drive, the determination, or the stamina necessary to survive an era of change. It is all too likely that the Dulleas and Brownes, arriving in Montana at a time when most of the eastern emigrants were on

an equal social footing, were so intent on assuring a place for their children in the rapidly evolving upper middle-class that they overlooked the need to develop within them qualities of self-discipline and endurance.

But, such a hypothesis, on its own, does not seem entirely adequate. While history is full of tales of parents who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps only to have their children waste the family fortune on bad investments and indulgent living, Nellie and Joseph had not been overprotected children. Unlike many children of the privileged class who never experienced adversity, Nellie and Joseph had been expected to work hard within their families. And so, while the possibility exists that Nellie and Joseph were not required to shoulder the degree of responsibility necessary to ensure mature behaviors and decisions, it seems unlikely that immaturity alone led to their financial failure.

Perhaps the ranching failures of Nellie and Joseph, and of several other second generation Beaverhead families, find their root cause not in misguided child rearing practices but instead in the national economic condition of the era. The inflated returns for ranchers during the years preceding and including World War I undoubtedly led them into a false sense of security and prosperity. Their parents had profited substantially two decades earlier. Reasoning would dictate that if the sons followed the examples set by the



fathers, ranching should be a secure livelihood. But an entire generation was taken unawares by the realities of a boom and bust economy. Perhaps these were the core issues behind the Browne's inability to prosper. But this explanation is ultimately unsatisfactory as well. Nellie and Joseph wisely made their initial sell-out during the boom years. But the following bust rendered their purchasers unable to pay, so Nellie and Joseph became, in essence, victims of bad times. More is involved, however, as they were already in trouble before they sold out, when agricultural prices were still high. We must look deeper.

A third possible contributor to the financial failures experienced by Nellie and Joseph and many of their ranching peers may have been the rapid technological strides made during the early years of the new century. This was an era of unprecedented change. Nellie and Joseph were born in the horse and buggy days, lived in the age of the automobile, and died during the inception of the rocket age. The manner in which the father ranched was obsolete for his son. The enormity of the impact which both electricity and the gasoline engine had on our nation is almost beyond imagining. For the rancher, it meant large outlays for new equipment and little resale value for the old. It also meant learning new skills and methods, as well as having the flexibility to be willing to do so over the tried and true systems. Joseph and Nellie appear to have been able, even

enthusiastically so, to embrace the new ways, but the time and expense such alterations entailed certainly would have exerted additional pressures on a marginally successful rancher. The physical and financial demands of modernization, combined with a lack of maturity, followed by a recessive economy most likely acted in concert to create ultimate failure for the children where the parents had been so successful. This failure sets the context for Nellie's story.

Nellie's story is an arresting one. It contains all the requisite elements necessary to guarantee an attentive audience: extravagance, financial ruin, love, danger, substance abuse, scandal, family feuding, insanity. It is all there, played out against the backdrop of the American West. But from the historian's perspective there must be more than sensationalism to make a story worth telling. We need to be able to fit stories into a known backdrop and find that, because of their addition, the old picture is different. Certainly, there are aspects of this story that provide new perspectives on western women's history.

Nellie's life coincided with a period of transition in American women's roles. Society's concepts concerning desired female attitudes and behavior were breaking apart and reforming in new patterns as the nation moved from the Victorian Age into the Progressive Era. Women from the earlier age were expected to play their parts backstage,

leaving the spotlight for their husbands. In keeping with this expectation, women were affirmed through their attitudes of submissiveness, passivity, and selflessness. As social dictates began to change, women recast their roles to include public life. The Progressive Era endorsed independent working women: women who stepped out their front doors each morning, dressed in jaunty short skirts, and, armed with an aura of confidence, went off to work. However, this change did not take place overnight. Attitudes and values change gradually during periods of transition.

During such a period of transition, while support for the Victorian Womanhood was waning, but before the role of the New Womanhood had solidified, spaces may have been created for more flexible role definition. These spaces, or places of role uncertainty, may have provided women with an opportunity to claim a greater autonomy than they could have had in an environment of clearly set roles. While the lack of firmly established roles may have given women the freedom to act in ways that may have been unacceptable either before or after the transitional period, the Progressive Era may also have been characterized by the erosion of familiar systems of support. In other words, during the early 20th century traditional support systems would be breaking down, or at the least, eroding, but the new institutionalized public systems of assistance would not yet be in place. It

was within this historical space that Nellie's story was played out, and it is because she serves as an example of these dynamics that her story receives its significance.

Nellie was neither a New nor a Victorian woman; she was a multi-dimensional woman who did not consistently fit into historians' ideas of periodization. While always willing to fall back into the role of the Victorian wife, if it served her purposes, Nellie lived with an outwardly expressed sense of autonomy that cannot be neatly delineated and categorized by modern historians. We see the diversity of her roles when we consider her actions.

Avidly seizing many of the opportunities available to her, Nellie traveled, alone or with family or friends; she voted; she chose not to plant a vegetable garden; she conducted legal business; involved herself in real estate dealings; she even drank with friends before breakfast. But, lest we begin to think of her as a thoroughly modern New Woman, consider the behaviors she was unwilling to endorse. She never raised her hemlines, she never took up smoking or swearing, she was uninterested in working for women's rights, divorce as a method for coping with Joseph's insanity was not a consideration, and she never attempted to find a job outside of her home, even though many of her friends were employed. She used the family car, though just as a way to get to Melrose to buy Joseph's papers, yet thought nothing of taking the train to Portland for a three-

month visit with her sister. She never once castigated Joseph for his attack on her, but did not hesitate to have him committed. Her behavior defies categorization.

Nellie used the space in behavioral codes provided by the transitional atmosphere of her day to do what she wanted, and because we cannot find any trace of censure for her attitudes of autonomy and independence, it can be assumed that not only did society approve, but that other women were doing the same. Her unhesitating involvement in the business world was just as accepted as was her cooking and cleaning on the ranch. And when the time came for her to assume a managerial position over her husband, she did so with the tacit acceptance of her community. Perhaps the West offered her more scope for this eclecticism, but the wider context was an age of multiple and shifting gender roles.

So, what have we learned from Nellie? First and foremost, we must recognize that the transitional nature of the period in which she lived had an impact on women's attitudes and behaviors. One result of viewing history as a series of distinct eras is that the periods of transition tend to be ignored, and yet it seems illogical to assume that a transitional period would have the same characteristics, albeit to a lesser degree, as the adjoining eras. Historians must carefully examine the interim period between the Victorian Age and the emergence of New

Womanhood, for those of Nellie's generation belonged to neither. As the study of her life shows, she reacted to the break in clearly defined gender roles by claiming a greater degree of autonomy than she could have had just twenty years earlier. But the flip side to greater freedom for women at this time was less support for women in times of stress.

The negative aspect of the transitional period in which Nellie lived eventually proved to be her undoing. Because gender roles and family dynamics were in a state of flux, there existed few social institutions, formal or informal, to provide support for women who were metaphorically "widowed" by incapacitated husbands. For a woman separated from kin networks, or old friendship networks, or the ranch as Nellie was once she moved to Butte, there was no common code of discourse or behavior by which she could address her need for support.

The transformation process created gaps in traditional systems of support for women. A century earlier, Mary Fish, whose story is told in *A Way of Duty*, had received support from a strong informal social structure composed of her religious faith, a broader, more inclusive kin network, and a gender role that held the reassurance of clear definition. Today, a half-century after Nellie's time, women receive support from other sources. Currently, women have available to them formal systems of support in the forms of therapists, a vast array of self-help literature, and a

variety of organizations that provide services for women, such as employment agencies, battered women's shelters, business incubators, and displaced homemakers' programs. Furthermore, women of today are expected to be autonomous. Mary Fish was taught to rely on her faith and the traditional power that came from fulfilling the role of respected goodwife; women today are taught to rely on learned coping skills and on a variety of social institutions. But, Nellie was caught in the middle. Without skills, traditions or institutions to fall back on, in an era of shifting values, she attempted to meet her responsibilities and her own needs with a cheerful stoicism that really did little to ease her plight.

Second, and of equal importance, we learn that even in her supposedly "modern" era, mental illness was devastating, not solely for the patient who had to endure the indignities and discomforts of an ineffectual state hospital system, but also for the family members who carried the same social stigma as the patient. Unexpected and unaccepted, the burden of a mentally ill family member required special fortitude, for this was a role entirely separate from other marginal roles in society. Unlike the prostitute or the criminal, the mentally ill were viewed with suspicion and misunderstanding unequalled in the cases of the other two. Surviving the social shame of her association with not just one committed family member, but two, required Nellie to

bring forth every resource she had, which did not, in the end, prove to be sufficient. To a certain degree, even the relatives of the mentally ill existed as marginal members of society who attempted to cope with the pain of loss and isolation without the benefit of a support system. And so Nellie was worn down by the double burden of the stigma of mental illness, and the lack of coherent systems of support for married women experiencing family turmoil.

Thirdly, Nellie's story reaffirms the plight of white, middle-class women in the United States, who, ever since the mid-19th century sentimentalization of marriage, were allowed to proceed through life believing that when they married decent, hard-working men they would live happily ever after. The training they received was centered around home management and childcare, while business concerns were largely left to their husbands. Yet, the reality has been that most women of the past who survived the trials of childbirth outlived their husbands. Left without the benefit of preparation for just such an event, many white, middle-class women found themselves unprepared to carry on both the financial and managerial responsibilities necessary to support themselves and their households. In the final years of life themselves, tired and often in less than robust health, they had neither the training nor the energy to assume such a burden. Viewed in such a context, the lessons from Nellie's story are not just for historians, but



for all women who do not wish to fall prey to similar circumstances.

Finally, what is uniquely western in all of this? What we learn is that women of the West lived in a shifting and increasingly suspect economic terrain and needed definite attributes to enhance their chances of survival. Resiliency was certainly one of these, for the environment was often harsh and required a flexibility, an endurance, and a willow-like ability to bend with the forces of a lonely world that oscillated between good fortune and disaster. A sense of humor and a female support system would have been indispensable. Western life was taxing, frequently tedious in the sameness of its daily toils, and often unexpectedly tragic. Women who were equipped with the capacity to find amusement in life, and women who had friends with whom they could laugh or cry were at an advantage in their efforts to withstand the immense toll western life could exact from the spirit.

All these traits were a part of Nellie's nature. They helped her cope with the challenges that faced her. Ultimately, however, it was her sense of autonomy that enabled her to accomplish the monumental tasks that were part of her everyday life. Had this quality been disallowed by the established gender roles of another place or an earlier generation, she would not have done as well as she did.

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